

Title: Harry Potter – Slytherin: The Chamber of Secrets

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Summary: Harry Potter, sorted into Slytherin House, discovers the Chamber of Secrets.

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Chapter 1 – The Worst Summer

The cat flap in Harry’s bedroom door squeaked.

Harry sighed. The squeak meant Aunt Petunia had just shoved his dinner into the room. He did not even bother to look at it. He just laid on his bed staring at the ceiling.

‘Just one more day,’ he thought, *‘Then I’ll be going back to school.’*

Hedwig gave a sullen squawk.

“All right. Just a minute,” said Harry listlessly.

He got up, retrieved from the floor the small tray holding his meager ration of food, and walked over to Hedwig’s cage. She looked dreadful. She was so hungry now that she would eat anything Harry offered her -- which often was more than he kept for himself.

His belt was on its last notch, and it could easily have used a few more because of how much weight he had lost. But he did not have anything to punch new holes.

Harry fished out the bits from the thin soup he thought would be best for Hedwig and put them in her feeding bowl. She gave him the same disdainful look he had come to expect as he fitted the shallow bowl through the feeding slot in her cage.

“Just one more day, Hedwig. Then you’ll be free too,” he said encouragingly.

Harry stood and finished what remained of the soup and put the dish back on the tray. Then he drained the cup of tepid tea and carried his ‘desert’, a piece of stale bread, back to his bed.

He glanced at the calendar hanging on the wall next to his pillow. Today’s date, August thirty-first, had not yet been crossed out. He would do that right before he turned out the light to sleep.

Harry flopped down on the bed and thought about what a miserable summer it had been -- the worst ever.

It had started out OK. He had spent most of July harassing Dudley with threats of magic, including giving him a new pig’s tale. Of course, Dudley always tattled. Then Harry would end up doing hours of chores around the house for his aunt and uncle as punishment. And, as often as not, be sent to his room without supper.

In thinking about it, Harry realized he had started going too far with Dudley because he was angry -- neither Hermione nor Draco had written to him. They had promised. Well, at least Hermione had. And also she said she was going to invite him over to her house, but not a word. He would have been happy if just Hagrid had written. But there had been nothing from him either.

Uncle Vernon had locked Hedwig’s cage so Harry could not send letters of his own. He kicked himself for not getting Hermione’s Muggle mailing address or phone number. He was tempted to use magic to unlock Hedwig’s cage, but knew he was not allowed to use magic outside of school. Somehow the Ministry of Magic would know, and he would be in serious trouble.

Then, on his birthday, things took a turn for the worse. Of course, his aunt and uncle had forgotten it was his birthday. But Dudley had not, and he needled Harry about it all morning until Harry threatened to use magic again. As a result, his aunt worked him to exhaustion all afternoon, then fed him beggars rations and sent him to his room.

His aunt was frantic because she was getting ready to host a dinner party for one of Uncle Vernon’s very important prospective business clients and his wife. Uncle Vernon had made it crystal clear that Harry was to stay in his room and be quiet during the party -- or else.

Just as Harry was opening the door to enter his bedroom, he heard the dinner guests arriving below. At that point, he did not care; he was exhausted and ready for bed.

What happened next ruined the remainder of his summer.

A strange creature was sitting on his bed.

It was humanoid but small, like a child. It had large bat-like ears, huge bulging green eyes, a long thin nose, and a high-pitched voice. Still, Harry assumed it was male. It was wearing nothing but a dirty old pillowcase. The creature introduced himself as, “Dobby, the house-elf.”

Afterwards, just thinking about Dobby -- the little git -- made Harry very angry.

Dobby had come to give Harry a warning, or so he claimed. The elf said there was a plot to make terrible things happen at Hogwarts that would put Harry in mortal danger, and because of that, Harry must not go back to school.

That was about the only thing the elf had been very clear about. Trying to get information out of him was like pulling teeth. The little creature was incredibly evasive when Harry asked him questions.

The house-elf might not have come at all -- Harry wished now that he had not -- because the little creature said he had reservations. He had squeaked, “Dobby was being unsure about warning Harry Potter because he is being sorted into Slytherin house. Dobby is wondering if Harry Potter is also being a Dark Wizard like He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. But then Dobby is hearing Harry Potter is kind and brave. So, Dobby is seeing for himself and is watching Harry Potter. He is seeing that Harry Potter is not being dark like his master and is needing Dobby’s help.”

Apparently, the elf heard about the ‘so called’ dangerous plot from his master but would not say who he was. The thing that seemed to have swayed Dobby to come was Harry’s two triumphs over He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. Yet the elf indicated that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named was *not* involved in this new plot against Harry.

Dobby claimed he wanted to protect Harry. The little elf’s miserable state of bondage and servitude initially made Harry quite sympathetic, but what happened next changed his mind completely.

The stupid house-elf let slip that he had intercepted every letter sent by Harry's friends. He even had the impudence to show Harry the large stack of mail. Then he demanded -- demanded! -- that Harry promise not to go back to school to get his letters back.

When Harry refused, the accursed elf ran down to the kitchen, levitated Aunt Petunia's dinner party pudding and then smashed it onto the floor. Of course, Harry had chased after the elf and ended up covered in the mess. The elf had then disappeared into thin air, leaving Harry to get the blame.

For a short time, there was pandemonium, as everyone rushed from the dining room into the kitchen. But Aunt Petunia was able to temporarily save the party by resettling her guests and serving ice cream for dessert. Uncle Vernon explained that Harry was a disturbed orphan nephew and set him to cleaning up the kitchen in disgrace. But that was not the end of it.

What finished off the dinner party -- and Harry's summer -- was a huge barn owl swooping through the dining room window and delivering a letter onto the head of the wife of Uncle Vernon's prospective client. Apparently, she had a bird phobia and ran from the house shrieking -- followed soon by her husband after first telling Uncle Vernon off.

Uncle Vernon angrily tore open the letter but then snorted in surprise as he read it. He gleefully showed the letter to Harry. It was an official warning from the Ministry of Magic for using underage magic. It threatened expulsion from Hogwarts if Harry committed another offense. Uncle Vernon dragged Harry up to his room, locked him in, and told him he would never go back to school again -- laughing at the irony that if Harry used magic to escape, he would be expelled.

To make good his threat, Uncle Vernon had iron bars fitted to Harry's bedroom window and installed the cat flap in the door.

Since then, Harry had been locked in his room, allowed out only to use the bathroom in the morning and at night, and served three very meager meals a day through the cat flap.

At first, Harry was certain Uncle Vernon would relent, because surely he would rather have Harry go away to school and be out of the house for a full ten months of the year. But it soon became apparent that Uncle Vernon enjoyed torturing Harry even more.

Every time he walked by Harry's door, he would drum his fingers on it and declare, "You're never getting out, boy."

With each passing day in August, Harry's anger at Dobby grew. Harry only kept his sanity during the endlessly long month by thinking up different ways to kill Dobby and, more importantly, by believing he would be rescued when he did not show up for school.

Chapter 2 – Midnight Rescue

Harry watched the clock in his room on the first day of September.

Eleven AM came and went. He knew the Hogwarts Express had left Kings Cross station.

The hours dragged by. Harry kept his window opened listening intently for any sound of possible visitors. He jumped at the sound of every car in the street even though he doubted any witches or wizards traveled by car.

The later it got, the more anxious he felt. When it got dark outside, he began to feel desperate. He managed to cope by telling himself he would not take any action until tomorrow, which would likely indicate there was *not* going to be a rescue.

Only then would he implement his escape plan.

His plan was to wait until Uncle Vernon had gone to work. Dudley was already off to board at Smeltings for the school year. Then as soon as Aunt Petunia left the house to get groceries or do something with her friends, Harry would break down the door to his room, get his belongings and leave. He would go to Diagon Alley in London and get help.

His plan also had a fail-safe. Before he left the house, he would get wire cutters from Uncle Vernon's tool chest, cut open Hedwig's cage, and send her to deliver a letter he had already written to Professor Dumbledore. It would take her a least a day to fly to Hogwarts, but if the Durley's managed to catch Harry before he got to Diagon Alley, he would be set -- unless his aunt and uncle decided to do him in, once and for all.

In his present state of mind, and his treatment over the last month, Harry did not think it was outside the realm of possibilities. At the very least, he and Hedwig would starve to death in another month anyway.

It was a good plan. It gave him comfort. He was ready to go. And he would *not* have to use magic. Though lugging his school trunk across the city was not going to be easy.

The doorbell woke him. He must have dozed off. The clock read 10:30 PM.

Harry could hear Uncle Vernon's raised voice in the living room.

"Who the blazes *is* that at this hour?"

The next thing Harry heard was the front door opening, then, unmistakably, Professor Dumbledore's voice.

Dumbledore!

"Good evening, Mr Dursley. I am afraid we have never had the pleasure of meeting, though I have corresponded with your lovely wife, Petunia. I am Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Forgive me for the late hour. May I please come in?"

Harry had his ear pressed to the door. His heart was beating with excitement and anticipation. He was not disappointed.

Professor Dumbledore spoke to both his aunt and uncle in the living room. In no uncertain terms he chastised them for their abuse and neglect of Harry. He warned them that he would have them brought up on charges by civil authorities if Harry reported anything untoward from now on. Then he told Petunia that he expected her to abide by the terms of his letter.

"I do not expect you to love your sister's child like your own -- only that you protect him by giving him house room *and* treat him like a decent human being. In return, you and your family will continue to receive my protection, which I may say, is *considerable*."

A moment or two later, Harry heard Dumbledore calling from the living room. "Harry, come down and bring all your school things."

The door to Harry room suddenly swung open. The lock fell off Hedwig's cage and the bars on Harry's window disappeared along with the cat flap. Hedwig shrieked. Harry released her from her cage, and she immediately soared out the window.

Harry grabbed Hedwig's cage, his already stuffed school bag from his room, and ran down the stairs. Then he hauled his heavy school trunk from the hall cupboard under the stairs, where he had slept for almost ten years before getting Dudley's second bedroom, and lugged everything to the front door.

Dumbledore was waiting there and smiling. "Good to see you again, Harry."

Harry beamed, "Thank you for coming, sir."

"Forgive me for being late, my dear boy," said Dumbledore apologetically. "Let me send your things on ahead."

With a wave of his wand, Harry's trunk, school bag, and Hedwig's cage disappeared with a loud pop.

Harry heard Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia gasp from the living room.

"Would you like to say goodbye to your aunt and uncle?" offered Dumbledore with a wink.

Harry wanted to see their faces. He leaned over and peered into the living room. They were sitting huddled on the couch looking terrified.

In the most cheerful voice he could muster, he waved and said, "See you next summer Aunt Petunia, Uncle Vernon. I had a *great* time this summer. Please say, 'Hi!' to Dudley for me. Goodbye."

His aunt and uncle whimpered. It was priceless.

"Well, Harry, let us depart," said Dumbledore cheerfully. "We have a bus to catch."

Harry thought Professor Dumbledore was joking, but to Harry's surprise, he was not.

Dumbledore walked Harry to the curb at number Four, Privet Drive, stopped and held his wand out horizontally over the street. In less than a second, Harry was blinded by

enormous headlights as a huge bus raced down the street and screeched to a halt right next to them. It was a vivid purple triple-decker.

“This is the Knight Bus, Harry,” said Dumbledore and, as if on cue, the conductor, a tall skinny pimply-faced young man, started into an obviously rehearsed spiel about the Knight Bus, “...emergency transport for the stranded witch or wizard...”

His name was Stan Shunpike and before he had quite finished, he suddenly stopped, gaped at Professor Dumbledore, and then stammered, “S, sorry, Professor Dumbledore, I didn’t expect... I, I mean... please come on board, sir.” As he held his hand out to lead the way, he turned his head and yelled to the driver, “Hey, Ern. It’s Professor Dumbledore -- no joke.”

Professor Dumbledore waved to the driver.

Stan offered Professor Dumbledore and Harry the brass beds at the front, but Dumbledore asked, “Stan, if it would not be too much trouble, and if none of the other passengers would object, I wonder if you might drop Harry Potter and me off at Hogwarts directly. You see, we are already quite late.”

“Harry Potter!” yelled Stan, and he swiveled to look more closely at Dumbledore’s companion. It was obvious to Harry that Stan was searching for the scar on his forehead.

“Hey, Ern, guess who’s with Professor Dumbledore... It’s *Harry Potter!*” he exclaimed. Then he caught himself and said quickly, “Oh, no one’s gonna object, sir. It’s an honor, a pleasure to have you and little Harry Potter here on board, sir. No charge.”

The quip about ‘little’ Harry Potter rankled Harry. Stan was in his late teens, at most.

Harry was very glad there were not multiple stops. Just getting to Hogwarts almost made him ill. The Knight Bus accelerated like a rocket and practically flew across the countryside. It frequently made jarring changes in direction as it followed every conceivable road, alley, and cow path to reach their destination.

The bus stopped as abruptly as it had started. They were right outside the Hogwarts gate. Dumbledore gave payment for himself and Harry, despite Stan not wanting to accept it. They made their farewells and the bus departed with a BANG!

“A means of magical transport I wanted to make you aware of, Harry,” said Dumbledore, adding, “But one which is best undertaken on an empty stomach to be sure.”

Harry laughed.

Professor Dumbledore and Harry walked up to the school gate, which opened with a wave of Dumbledore’s wand and closed behind them.

As they continued up the path to the front door of the castle, Professor Dumbledore told Harry that as soon as Hermione and Draco had arrived at school, they had alerted Professors McGonagall and Snape that Harry was not on the Hogwarts express.

“They believed you to be in some sort of mortal peril. I was able to determine otherwise; how so, I cannot reveal. So, I decided to perform my duties at the Welcoming Feast. I was confident that you would not do anything unwise for at least a day or two. Am I correct?”

Harry eagerly told Professor Dumbledore about his escape plan.

“Yes. A good plan, Harry. However, let me say this. Based on what happened last year, I would urge you to exercise caution in going out alone in the future, especially at night. Until Lord Voldemort is truly dead, you are in danger. We shall talk more about this later. But be assured, you are *safe* at Hogwarts.”

“Sir, I got a letter from the Ministry...” said Harry.

“Ah, yes,” said Dumbledore. “Levitation, was it?”

They had arrived at the front door. It was just after midnight.

“Yes, sir. But...” began Harry, but Dumbledore cut him off.

“Nothing to worry about, Harry,” said Dumbledore assuredly. “Please go see Professor Snape in his office. He is waiting for you. Good night, Harry.”

Professor Dumbledore strode across the Entry Hall and up the marble staircase.

Professor Snape had leftovers from the feast waiting for Harry in his office. Harry was starving. He ate until he felt he was going to burst. Snape told him his school things as

well as all of his textbooks and supplies for second year were waiting for him in his dorm room. When Harry finally finished eating, Snape said he had a few things he wanted to tell him.

Harry expected a lecture. And Professor Snape started out by telling him he was a rule breaker, so Harry braced for it, but was surprised by what came next.

“If you break a rule, Mr Potter, it must be for a very, *very* good reason. Sometimes it *may* be justified. However, that does not give you *license* to break rules and disobey your teachers at will. In my mind, your behavior last year, *at times*, justified suspension... if not expulsion. Mr Potter, I *hope* you are listening. Your *father* was a rule breaker too, but he was *malicious*. If you were not aware, your father and I went to school together. We were enemies. Frankly, we *hated* each other. You *look* like your father, but you are *different* -- you were sorted into Slytherin -- and I have learned that you are *not quite* like him. You are rather more like...” Snape paused and did not finish the sentence.

It seemed to Harry that Professor Snape was about to say he was more like his mother and then decided against it.

After a moment, Snape said, “I am not... *dissatisfied*... having you in my house. But do not disappoint me *this* year. And remember... *Keep me informed.*”

Professor Snape’s mention of his father and almost his mother whetted Harry’s appetite for more. It was almost like wanting to see them again in the Mirror of Erised. But he knew he would not get any more information from Professor Snape -- at least he dare not ask now. He would have to see Hagrid as soon as possible. Hagrid had given Harry the photo album. That meant he knew a lot more than he told Harry last year, including who their friends were. Harry could write them asking for information, stories... anything.

Everyone was asleep when he finally got to his dorm room. Even with renewed thoughts of his mother and father in his head, he was quickly asleep.

Chapter 3 – Gilderoy Lockhart

When Harry got up the next morning, Draco shook his hand and welcomed him back. He told Harry to save his story until they saw Hermione so he would not have to tell it twice.

Hermione was waiting outside the Great Hall when Draco and Harry came up for breakfast. They moved into a corner of the Entry Hall to have more privacy. Harry told them what happened.

As soon as Draco heard Harry say, “a house-elf named Dobby,” his jaw dropped and he exclaimed, “Dobby! What did he look like?”

Harry described the creature that had ruined his summer.

Draco shook his head. “That’s *him*. Dobby is my family’s house-elf. I can’t believe he left the house without permission.” He then confirmed what Dobby told Harry about the servitude of house-elves, adding, “All the old wizard families have house-elves. They *live* to work. I mean, they *love* it. It’s what they *do*.”

Hermione looked skeptical.

“That’s not what Dobby said,” said Harry.

“Well, he’s *mental*, isn’t he,” explained Draco. “Look what he *did to you*, Harry.”

“You’re right about that,” agreed Harry.

“If you want to scare a *normal* house-elf to death, threaten to give them clothes. That’s the only way to get rid of one -- giving it any piece of clothing. They’ll do anything to stay in servitude. Not Dobby -- he’s deranged,” said Draco.

“Then why don’t you let him go?” asked Hermione.

“House-elves are scarce, hard to come by. You don’t just let them go. Their lines go back generations in some families,” replied Draco.

“So, what about the plot against the school and Harry that Dobby was talking about?” asked Hermione.

Draco shrugged, “I have no idea. I didn’t hear anything. Like I said, Dobby isn’t right in the head.”

Harry and Hermione just looked at him, so Draco expanded his answer. “Look... It doesn’t make sense. Last year, before school started, my father encouraged me to get

to know Harry. Well, I didn't because, well... my father is a little... strict... and we don't get... I mean... anyway, later I got to know Harry and we became friends. So, when I got home, I told my father everything that happened last year. He seemed *very* pleased. So, what Dobby said just doesn't make sense."

Hermione looked satisfied with Draco's explanation, so she had Harry continue his story.

She and Draco were appalled at how the Dursleys had treated him.

"You *do* look very thin, Harry," observed Hermione, sounding very maternal.

Harry's escape plan impressed them. Then they almost cheered when he told them about Professors Dumbledore's rescue. And they loved the story about riding on the Knight Bus. Draco said he knew about it, but his parents did not approve of using it. They said it was meant for the poor, in other words -- *riff raff*. Harry finished by telling them about his meeting with Professor Snape and having leftovers from the feast. But he did not tell them what Snape had said about his father and Harry.

When Harry finished, they barely had time to get breakfast and their new timetables.

Their class schedule was the same as first year. During the first week, they learned about Mandrakes in Herbology.

A new Gryffindor first-year named Colin Creevey introduced himself to Harry and tried to take his photograph. Draco told him to get lost or get pounded. Hermione was incensed and Harry allowed the picture to be taken, but only with Draco and Hermione included.

This happened outside during midmorning break. Ron Weasley was nearby and made a derisive comment. It was like a trigger for Draco. Harry and Hermione had to hold him back. From that point on, Draco resumed his harassment of Ron where he left off the year before. Harry tried to dissuade him, but not *too* vigorously. Hermione no longer protested, because of how Ron had treated her.

The next day, Hermione caught up with Harry and Draco in the corridor. She had just come from Defense Against the Dark Arts while they were on their way. Her hair was bushier than usual, and her face looked heated. She said excitedly that she and the

other Gryffindors had spent half the period catching Cornish Pixies that Professor Lockhart had released into the classroom.

“You’ll *love* him. Have fun!” she finished and dashed off to Transfiguration.

It was clear to Harry and Draco from the very start that Professor Lockhart was a loud-mouth, self-promoting, foppish idiot.

They *did not* love him.

And there were no Cornish Pixies to catch for their class, which might have at least been fun. Instead, they took a ridiculous quiz on Professor Lockhart’s four published adventure chronicles, which he had passed off as Defense Against the Dark Arts textbooks. Then he selected students to read passages aloud from the books as he acted out the action. It was a joke. He was a joke.

The worst part was Lockhart singling out Harry; first, by identifying Harry as the most famous student in the school -- though not quite as famous as he was -- and offering to coach him on how to manage his career; and second, by having Harry play the part of his adversaries in the reenactments.

Harry turned red with embarrassment.

Before the class was over, Draco had come up with an appropriate nickname -- Professor *Lockfart*. Harry loved it and he almost got detention for laughing out loud hysterically.

Across all the houses, the boys hated Professor Lockhart.

The girls loved him.

Chapter 4 – Mudbloods and Murmurs

Harry went alone to see Hagrid the first free Friday afternoon. He told Draco and Hermione he would catch up with them later by the Black Lake.

He sat outside with Hagrid and Fang. He told Hagrid what Professor Snape told him.

“It’s true, Harry. He an yer father, James, didn’t get on. ’Course he was in Gryffindor and Perfessor Snape was in Slytherin, which made it natural. But it was more ’an that. James was smart, popular, plus the Gryffindor Seeker. I mean, Snape, he was smart too, ’course, but he was pretty much the same then as now. An this was ’bout twenty-five years ago, when people started takin’ sides as You-Know-Who was jus’ beginin’ ta gather followers. It made fer extra bad blood with the Slytherins, who were pretty much all goin’ with You-Know-Who.”

“Professor Snape called my father a rule breaker... but he meant it differently than he did for me. He implied I had a good reason for rule breaking last year, but my father never did... Professor Snape said he was *malicious*,” said Harry seeking to know more.

“Well, James an his gang did carry on a bit. They spent a *lot* o’ time in detention...” started Hagrid.

“My father had a *gang!*” exclaimed Harry.

“Well, maybe that’s too strong a word... but him and his friends were tight, *very* tight. They did everythin’ t’gether -- never saw one without the others,” replied Hagrid.

“Who *are* they? Can I write to them?” asked Harry anxiously.

Hagrid sighed. “Sorry, Harry. One’s dead, ’nother’s in Azkaban -- the wizard prison -- an I haven’t heard or seen the last one since You-Know-Who disappeared. I’d advise against it, Harry. Dredgin’ up too many bad memories... if yer askin’ me. I’m thinkin’ ya should talk ta Perfessor Dumbledore ’bout it first.”

Harry got the message -- Hagrid did not want to talk about his father’s friends.

“What about my mum, Hagrid?” asked Harry, eager to know more.

“Lily...” said Hagrid wistfully. His eyes teared up. “Nicest, kindest witch I ever knew...” and he started sobbing.

“Am I more like *her* than my dad?” Harry asked slowly after Hagrid composed himself.

“Yer the best o’ *both*,” declared Hagrid, sobbing again. He suddenly reached out and hugged Harry, nearly cracking his ribs and knocking the wind out of him.

On Saturday morning, Flint held the Slytherin Quidditch team tryouts. This was unusually early -- a full eight weeks before their first scheduled game, versus Gryffindor. Flint said he wanted to dominate even more than the previous year.

Harry encouraged Draco to try out. And he did, doing very well, but Flint ranked him fourth among the Chaser candidates. He went with the oldest two players -- plus Adrian Pucey from the previous year. No one challenged Harry for the Seeker job.

Hermione watched the tryouts and cheered for Draco.

As Harry, Hermione and Draco walked back from tryouts, they saw Ron Weasley and Zabini approaching on the path. Ron was looking hard at them and kept his eyes fixed as they passed each other.

Then from behind them, Ron shouted, "Hey, Granger, why do you keep hanging out with *Slytherins*?"

Draco stopped cold. He slowly eased his right hand inside his robes.

Hermione whispered, "Ignore him," and tried to pull Draco along, but he shook her off. Harry stopped and turned.

"Hey, Potter," yelled Ron again, "your girlfriend's nothing but a traitorous little *Mudblood!*"

Draco whirled around with his wand out, pointed it at Ron, and shouted, "*Slugus Eructo!*"

Ron was knocked backward and landed flat on his back. Zabini barely got out of the way.

Ron swore and sat up. He started to go for his wand and then suddenly grabbed his stomach. His face turned white. He gagged once, twice, and then leaned forward and vomited a huge slime covered slug onto his robes. Zabini turned away but failed to suppress a dry heave.

Draco snarled, "That's what you *get* for your foul mouth, Weasley."

Unfortunately, the incident had not gone unnoticed. Professor McGonagall had seen and heard the whole thing. She had gone with Oliver Wood to observe the Slytherin tryouts to assess what Gryffindor was up against this year.

She ran up with Wood to prevent further rule breaking.

She ordered Zabini to take Weasley to the hospital wing. Ron barfed up more slugs the whole way. Mr Filch was furious at him for the mess he left in the corridors.

McGonagall then dismissed Harry and Hermione and took Draco to see Professor Snape. Draco was given a weeklong detention from Professor Snape for cursing Weasley. McGonagall gave Weasley a weeklong detention for calling Hermione a Mudblood and provoking Draco's attack.

Both Professors McGonagall and Snape made rare appearances in their respective house common rooms after dinner to condemn the incident in whole.

For many of the Slytherin students, it was a very uncomfortable lecture. 'Mudblood' was a term they used freely. It was practically part of their upbringing for many of them, especially the pure bloods. Yes, they all knew Harry's mother and the Gryffindor they considered his girlfriend -- in this case the victim -- were Muggle-born, but somehow that was different, even acceptable to ignore, given what Harry had accomplished. But having Draco, from a pure blood family like many of them, be the one to attack someone who used the term, forced them to think seriously about their prejudices.

However, the most shocking thing was how strongly Professor Snape had condemned use of the slur. He had not just gone through the motions of reminding them of school rules. He had practically spat the term 'Mudblood' when he said it. It was a wake-up call for the Slytherins. Many accepted it; some did not.

In her meeting with all the Gryffindor students except Ron, who was still in the hospital wing, Professor McGonagall apologized to Hermione. She said she was ashamed that any Gryffindor would use such a term. It was a stain on their house. Fred, George, and Percy Weasley also apologized for their family and said they could not understand why Ron would have said it, because their parents had not brought them up that way. Ginny Weasley, a first-year, who was the youngest Weasley child, did not say anything. She kept her head bowed in shame.

Harry, Hermione, and Draco visited Hagrid on Sunday. Hagrid said he had heard all about the incident, so they did not talk about it very much. Hagrid did say that Ron's parents were the best sort of people you would ever want to meet, and that he was sure they would be shocked when they found out. The Weasleys were a pure blood family to be sure, but they had fought against You-Know-Who and actually liked Muggles. For that, they were considered blood traitors by You-Know-Who's supporters. And that made them as much a target as any Muggle-born -- maybe even more so.

To lighten the conversation, Hermione told Hagrid how brilliant Professor Lockhart was.

Harry and Draco groaned.

"Hermione, *Lockhart's* an idiot," said Draco.

"Nonsense!" scoffed Hermione. "And you shouldn't be so disrespectful, Draco... If he were such an idiot, why would Professor Dumbledore hire him? And look at all the things he's done in his books," challenged Hermione.

"Says he's done," intoned Harry.

"Fact is, Hermione, he's the *only one* who'd take the job," said Hagrid. "Word is... the Defense job is *cursed*."

The three argued about Professor Lockhart until it was time to go and then continued arguing all the way back to the castle.

Ron Weasley was out of the hospital wing in time for breakfast on Monday. When the owls arrived to deliver mail, Ron got a Howler from his parents. It was universally deemed an instant classic -- one of the best parental dress downs ever heard in the history of Hogwarts. When it ended, Ron slunk out of the Great Hall without finishing his breakfast.

Ron did his detention with Hagrid in the Forbidden Forest. Hagrid told them later he had Ron maintaining the game trails and clearing deadfall -- backbreaking work it was.

Draco did his detention with Filch in the trophy room and elsewhere in the castle -- mostly cleaning and polishing the coats of armor. He was exhausted every morning.

Near the end of October, Harry was, as usual, studying with Hermione in the library. Harry offered to walk her back to her common room. As they approached the first-floor landing going upstairs, Harry heard a voice to his left that brought him up short.

It sent shivers up his spine and made the hair on the back of his neck stand up. It was the deathly cold voice of evil, pure evil, out for blood.

“Come... Come to me... Let me rip you... Let me tear you... Let me kill you...”

Harry looked past Hermione who had taken another step. He expected to see a ghost or... something, but there was nothing but the wall and a few portraits.

Hermione stopped and turned around.

“What...?” she started to say, when Harry quickly exclaimed, “Hermione, that *voice!* Where did it come from?”

“What voice?” she asked, looking perplexed.

She obviously had not heard it.

Harry looked at the nearest portrait on the wall, an ancient looking wizard sitting in an ornate chair holding a very fat cat, and asked, “Did you say anything just now?”

“Certainly not!” said the portrait, sounding indignant.

“Did you *hear* anything?” persisted Harry.

“Just *you*, disturbing the peace, young man,” he replied, turning away.

Harry sighed. He described to Hermione what he heard. Doing so made him shiver again.

She did not say anything for a moment. Then she asked something that surprised him. “Did your *scar* hurt?”

“My scar? No, nothing,” said Harry, knowing Hermione had to have a theory. She did.

“I believe you, Harry. It just seems *odd* that you get a warning from the Malfoy’s house-elf about a dangerous plot imperiling you and the school, and then *this* happens. I *don’t*

think it's a coincidence. We need to discuss this with Draco. But I don't think we should go to Professor Dumbledore or our Heads of House yet. You know what people think when you start hearing voices..."

Chapter 5 – The Deathday Party

Draco agreed with Hermione about the stigma of hearing voices that others could not. But he was doubtful about a connection between what Harry had heard and Dobby's warning, which he had not believed in the first place.

At breakfast on Halloween, Hermione told Harry and Draco that the Gryffindor house ghost, Nearly Headless Nick, invited her to his five-hundredth anniversary *Deathday* party. She planned to attend, and she invited them to come along. They were both quite curious and agreed to go. They planned to stay a while but leave in time for pudding at the Halloween Feast in the Great Hall.

When they got to Nick's party, it was nothing like they expected. It was held in the dungeons in a large room they had never been to. It was lit with ghostly blue-flame candles. But it was freezing cold. The music was positively awful -- like hundreds of fingernails on a chalkboard. The food was rotten and putrefying -- absolutely dreadful. There was nothing fit for the living to eat.

Hermione introduced Harry and Draco to Nick, who seemed quite nice. He was very talkative. Their house ghost, the Bloody Baron, never talked to anyone as far as they knew. He usually just scowled and rattled his chains.

There were at least a hundred ghosts in attendance, including all the school ghosts. Peeves the Poltergeist was also present. It was the first time Harry and Draco had met Peeves. He usually left the Slytherins alone because he was afraid of the Bloody Barron for some unknown reason.

Peeves forced Hermione to introduce them to Moaning Myrtle, a plump gloomy looking ghost who occupied the girl's bathroom on the second floor. It was the one with the permanent '*Out of Order*' sign because Myrtle was always wreaking havoc -- throwing tantrums and overflowing the sinks and toilets.

Harry noticed that Myrtle looked quite young and was wearing Hogwarts school robes. She clearly had a serious inferiority complex -- to the point of constantly demeaning

herself -- and was extremely sensitive. Peeve's drove her away in tears with a single childish insult.

Poor Nick was completely upstaged at his own party by a group of decapitated ghosts on horseback called the Headless Hunt. They were rude and raucous and played 'head hockey' with their leader's ghostly severed head.

Hermione explained to Harry and Draco that Nick's fondest wish was to become a member of the Hunt, but his application was rejected because he had not been completely decapitated when he died.

Finally, they had enough dispirited entertainment and were anxious to warm up and get something to eat. They departed without excusing themselves.

But before they had even left the dungeons, Harry heard the sinister voice again.

"...rip ...tear ...kill ..."

He stopped cold, exclaiming, "It's the voice again! It's *in* the wall... or behind it!"

Hermione and Draco looked at each other. "Are you sure?" asked Draco. "We don't..."

"Quiet!" yelled Harry, holding up his hand.

"...soo hungry ...for so long ..." The voice was moving up.

"It's moving!" yelled Harry and he ran down the corridor and up the stairs into the Entry Hall, followed closely by Hermione and Draco.

He dashed past the doors to the Great Hall, where the Halloween feast was still underway, and up to the marble staircase where he paused and strained his ears, trying to shut out the din from the feast.

"...kill ...time to kill ..." Now from above and fainter.

"It's going to *kill!*" shouted Harry. He raced up the stairs once more and stopped at the first floor, listening again. His heart was pounding.

"...I smell blood. ...I SMELL BLOOD!" Still above, but louder.

Harry launched himself up another flight to the second floor and flew down the corridor until he saw it -- a message, crudely hand painted on the wall, in foot tall letters.

***THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS HAS BEEN OPENED.
ENEMIES OF THE HEIR, BEWARE.***

Draco caught up with him first. “What the hell...?” He was pointing at something below the message.

It was Filch’s cat, hanging from a torch bracket by its tail.

Hermione, panting loudly, had almost reached them when she slipped and fell on her butt -- letting out large grunt, “Oooff!”

Harry and Draco both moved to help her up.

“The floor’s covered with *water*,” she said in frustration. Then she saw the message and Filch’s cat, and gasped, “Ooohh, *my!*”

“Is it... dead?” she asked.

They crept closer.

“Looks dead,” said Draco, poking at the cat with his wand. “It’s stiff as a board.”

“Maybe we should...” Harry started to say, when Hermione cut in, “We should get out of here, *now*. This has to be what Dobby warned you about, Harry.”

“She’s right,” said Draco sounding worried. “Let’s go.”

But it was too late. Gryffindors and Ravenclaws on the way from the feast to their houses were emerging from the landing, chatting, and laughing. The three had already been seen. And so had the message *and* Mrs. Norris. The students in front stopped dead and went quiet.

Someone pushed through to the front. It was Ron Weasley.

He pointed his finger at them and shouted, “IT’S YOU, POTTER! YOU’RE THE HEIR... OF *SLYTHERIN!*”

Suddenly, there was near pandemonium as students shouted and pushed closer to see for themselves. They could hear some students shouting down the stairwell, “Get the teachers!” “Get the Headmaster!” “Get Professor Dumbledore!”

Draco took Harry and Hermione’s arms and tried to melt with them into the crowd, but Percy Weasley, a Gryffindor Prefect, stopped them, saying, “You’re not going *anywhere*. Teachers are on the way.”

Professor Dumbledore and other teachers arrived moments later.

Percy presented himself and boasted, “Headmaster, I found these three at the *scene of the crime*.”

“Thank you, Mr Weasley,” said Dumbledore. “Now, please get the rest of the students back to their dormitories. The teachers will handle this now.”

Percy jumped into action and was starting to herd the students, when Mr Filch pushed through the throng.

“Mrs Norris?” he whimpered when he saw the hanging feline. Then he spotted Harry, Hermione, and Draco next to Dumbledore. His face contorted in rage, and he screamed, pointing his bony finger at them, “*You did this! You killed my cat! I’ll kill you too!*”

All the students being herded by Percy ignored him and stopped again to watch.

Filch started toward the three with his hands out looking to grab their throats.

Dumbledore shouted, “Argus, *stop!*” in a commanding voice, which echoed down the corridor.

Filch stopped abruptly as if he had run into a wall.

Then in a calm, deliberate voice, Dumbledore said, “We need to find out what happened. Teachers with me, Mr Filch too, and *you three*,” pointing to Harry, Hermione, and Draco.

Professor Lockhart offered the use of his office, which was nearby.

Professor Dumbledore retrieved Mrs Norris and cradled her gently in his arms. Mr Filch followed mournfully in the procession to Lockhart's office.

Percy resumed herding the students.

Rumors and speculation were already spreading like wildfire.

Chapter 6 – The Writing on the Wall

Professor Dumbledore placed Mrs Norris on Professor Lockhart's desk, examining her. Then he proceeded to sort out the incident.

First, he diplomatically silenced Professor Lockhart who had started to expound on a similar incident he had run across in an obscure eastern region of someplace Harry had never heard of. Then the Headmaster asked them what happened.

Harry was worried when Professor Dumbledore picked Hermione to explain how they happened to be where they were. He was afraid she might reveal too much, given her detailed account to the headmaster of the incident in Forbidden Forest the previous year. Then again, maybe not.

As if she had rehearsed her statement for a stage play, she began.

"Well, sir. Sir Nicholas invited me to attend his five-hundredth Deathday party in the dungeons. I invited Harry and Draco to accompany me, and they accepted. We went to the party which started a little before the Halloween Feast. We met all sorts of interesting ghosts from all over, including the Headless Hunt. Peeves was also there and on fairly good behavior. Unfortunately, the music set our nerves on edge and the food offering was completely putrid and revolting. We had planned to leave in time for pudding at the Halloween feast, but we had completely lost our appetites by then. I was feeling particularly nauseous, so Harry and Draco offered to escort me to the Gryffindor common room. When we arrived at the second floor, I noticed all the water on the floor. We walked down the corridor just a bit to see why and saw the writing on the wall and then Mrs Norris. We were there only a minute before everyone else arrived. You know the rest, sir."

Harry and Draco had nodded energetically throughout her monolog.

“I see,” said Dumbledore, sounding convinced. “Thank you, Miss Granger. Do any of the teachers have any questions?”

Snape and McGonagall looked at each other but did not say anything. Filch wailed, “What about my *cat*? Someone *killed* her. I want *justice!*”

“Argus, she is *not* dead,” responded Dumbledore assuredly. “She has been *petrified*. And I believe Professor Sprout has a fresh crop of Mandrakes growing which Professor Snape will be able use to make a restorative potion before the end of school.”

Filch complained that was months too long. Then, Professor Lockhart insisted he could have something whipped up by the next week, which gave Filch comfort. However, this obviously annoyed Professor Snape, who reminded Lockhart that *he* was the Potions Master at Hogwarts.

Dumbledore Interrupted, “Please tell your students there will be a *full* investigation. Now, however, I think it is time we adjourn and get some well-deserved sleep after such a marvelous feast.”

Harry’s empty stomach rumbled.

By morning it was official, at least to most of the students -- Harry Potter *was* the *Heir of Slytherin*. But what that meant, they were not sure -- yet.

Hermione met Harry and Draco in the Entry Hall when they came up for breakfast. She was frustrated because she had left her copy of *Hogwarts -- A History* at home and all the school copies had already been checked out of the library. The waiting list was weeks long.

“Everyone is trying to find out about the *Chamber of Secrets*,” she explained. “All I can remember is that it has never been found.”

Draco told Harry and Hermione that he remembered his father telling him the Chamber of Secrets was opened fifty years ago, before his time, and that a Muggle-born student had been killed. He said they also caught the student who opened the Chamber and expelled them.

Harry thought about that and then asked, “Did you know that Hagrid was expelled in his third year?”

Draco and Hermione both said, “No.”

Harry’s next question was, “Could Hagrid be sixty-three years old?”

“Well,” said Hermione, “He definitely looks *older* than my parents, so I suppose it’s possible. It’s hard to tell with all his facial hair.”

Draco laughed and then agreed.

Then Hermione added, “But I don’t think Hagrid could *possibly* be the one.”

“Maybe we should just ask him,” suggested Draco. “He’s friendly enough and, at the very least, he might be old *enough* to know something.”

“Maybe,” said Harry, “but I think we should find out more first.”

Hermione agreed this time and said, “Leave that to me.”

When Hermione met them in the library at midmorning break, she already had the answer.

She said she had just asked Professor Binns about the Chamber of Secrets in History of Magic class.

“Binns takes questions?” asked Harry, sounding quite surprised.

“Of *course*,” said Hermione, incredulous.

Harry and Draco looked at each other and just shrugged.

She told them Professor Binns said it was a legend, not supported by facts. The Chamber of Secrets was reported to have been built by Salazar Slytherin when he fell out with the other founders. He placed a monster inside the Chamber, which would someday be released by his *true heir* to rid the school of those he judged not worthy to be taught at Hogwarts -- in other words, Muggle-borns.

“Then what about the Chamber being opened fifty years ago?” asked Draco.

“He didn’t mention that,” said Hermione. “He just said the Chamber has never been found despite many attempts. Then he wouldn’t take any more questions about it.”

They discussed whether the legend could be true and who the heir could be. The thing that persuaded them of its truth was the voice that led Harry to the “scene of the crime” as Percy Weasley had called it.

Finally, Harry said, “We just have to find out who wrote the message on the wall and what kind of monster *petrifies* its victims and hangs them on torch brackets.”

“I think we need to have *another* look,” said Hermione firmly. “We’ll need to use your Invisibility Cloak, Harry.”

By dinner, everyone knew ‘The Heir’ meant an *actual* descendent of *Salazar* Slytherin himself. It just made Harry a stronger fit. He spoke Parseltongue, after all, and he was in Slytherin -- not to mention being caught at the ‘scene of the crime’. You did not need any more proof than that.

Most students now seemed afraid to look at Harry, much less talk to him -- even a few of his own house mates -- though most Slytherins congratulated him. It also significantly diminished Harry’s reputation as a defender of Muggle-borns.

That night after hours, Harry and Draco went to the seventh floor under the invisibility cloak to fetch Hermione. Then they returned to the second-floor corridor to investigate.

The message was still on the wall. Everyone knew Mr Filch had been unable to remove it despite using the best available magical mess removers.

Harry noticed at least a dozen spiders moving in single file across the stone floor, up the wall, and out the nearest window. Draco stomped several of the largest ones, annoying Hermione. “They’re just *spiders*, Draco. They won’t *hurt* you,” she chided.

“OK, Hermione. I’ll leave them alone if you want. But I’ve never seen spiders behave like that, have you?” asked Draco.

She hadn't. Neither had Harry. They wondered if there were a connection to the Chamber being opened, but even Hermione could not think of one.

Then Hermione said, "Well, the water's gone. I wonder where it came from."

"Well, the second-floor girl's bathroom is right over there," said Draco.

It was the one marked '*Out of Order*'. They went inside. Nothing seemed amiss, except for Moaning Myrtle, whom they heard wailing softly in one of the stalls.

"Maybe that explains it," whispered Hermione. "Myrtle flooded the bathroom and it flowed into the corridor."

"Well, if she did or not," said Harry quietly, "maybe she saw something. We need to ask her."

"Right," agreed Draco, whispering, "You ask her, Hermione; you're a girl. Harry and I will stay under the Cloak."

Hermione nodded and slipped out from under the invisibility cloak.

She cleared her throat, and called out, "Oh, Myrtle, I'd like to speak with you, please."

The wailing stopped. "Who's there!" Myrtle demanded.

"Myrtle, it's Hermione Granger. We met at Sir Nicholas's deathday party."

Myrtle floated up and out of the end cubicle and looked at Hermione. "I remember *you*. But you're out of bed *after hours*. I could *tell*..." teased Myrtle.

"Please don't," said Hermione kindly. "I need to ask you a question. It's very important."

"What?" said Myrtle suspiciously.

"The other night when the message was found on the wall outside along with Mrs Norris, did you see or hear anything?" asked Hermione.

"Nooo," replied Myrtle, still sounding suspicious.

“There was water all over the floor in the corridor. Did it come from here?” Hermione followed up.

“How should I know? I wasn’t here,” said Myrtle, sounding a little irritated.

“Of course,” said Hermione sympathetically, “But did you see or hear anything unusual?”

Myrtle was now irate. “You think just because the floor was flooded, *Myrtle* did it. If a toilet overflows, it’s *Myrtle*’s fault. Because *Myrtle* isn’t telling, she must be *hiding* something.”

“No. No, Myrtle,” said Hermione calmly.

But there was no consoling Moaning Myrtle. She began to cry and wail and was no longer comprehensible. Without warning, she dived down into the cubicle and a huge fountain of water erupted upward from the toilet. It hit the ceiling and splashed water in every direction. And it did not stop.

“Time to go,” said Draco as he pulled up the invisibility cloak and pulled Hermione back under it.

The water was already a half-inch deep as they made their escape.

Before taking Hermione back to Gryffindor house, they stopped to talk in an empty classroom.

Harry said, “Based on the legend, we have to assume the Heir is... or was... a Slytherin. Could it be a teacher? Could it be Professor Snape?”

“I suppose it could be, though I’m sure Professor Snape isn’t old enough for opening it fifty years ago,” said Draco. “But if there are *two* heirs, why would the latest wait until *now*?”

“Professor Lockhart’s new. Maybe...” began Harry.

“No. He’s a Ravenclaw,” interjected Hermione.

“And an idiot,” added Draco snickering.

“I wish you’d stop saying that,” said Hermione indignantly.

“Well, he *is*,” insisted Draco.

“Stop, you two,” interrupted Harry, sounding irritated. Then sounding serious, he asked, “Draco, do you think you could write a letter to your father and ask him to tell you again what he knows about the Chamber of Secrets and if he has any ideas of why or how it’s been opened again?”

“I... suppose...” said Draco slowly.

“I’m *not* suggesting Dobby was right,” said Harry, “I just want to find out anything we can about what we’re facing.”

“I’ll help you write it,” offered Hermione eagerly.

“I can write it *myself*, thank you,” said Draco flatly. “If you wrote it, it would sound like an interrogation by the Wizengamot.”

Chapter 7 – The Rogue Bludger

Professor Lockhart continued to be an idiot. By now, Harry had reenacted every creature encountered in Lockhart’s books at least once and the professor had just started *Year of the Yeti* over again. Harry was sick of it and trying hard to think of a way out. He asked Draco to volunteer, but Draco said, jokingly, “Friendship only goes so far, mate.”

Hermione could probably have thought of something, but Harry was not going to ask her. Saying anything against her ‘dear’ Professor Lockhart at this point would cause her to either walk away or give Harry and Draco the silent treatment for the rest of the day. That would not help them get their homework done.

On the first Saturday in November, Slytherin played Gryffindor in Quidditch.

Almost as soon as Madam Hooch had whistled the start of the match, one of the Bludgers made straight for Harry. It seemed to be faster than normal. He was able to dodge it in time, and Bole, one of the Slytherin beaters, batted it well away toward the Gryffindor Seeker. But instead of going after him, the Bludger reversed course and came after Harry again. Bole batted it away again with the same result. He called to his

partner, Derrick, “Hey, there’s somethin’ wrong with this Bludger. It keeps goin’ after Potter. Help me out here.”

Together, they were able to keep the strangely behaving Bludger away from Harry, but that meant the other Bludger was wreaking havoc on their Chasers. Flint yelled at them because Gryffindor was very quickly fifty points ahead. But Bole yelled back, “We can’t leave Potter; he’ll get *killed*, Flint. This Bludger’s gone *mad!*”

Flint called for a time out.

He told Bole to keep protecting Harry and for Derrick to keep the other Bludger off the Chasers. Then he told Pucey to stay near Potter to give the freakish Bludger another target.

Flint’s solution did not work out. Pucey was knocked off his broom by the Bludger and sent to the hospital wing. Derrick had to resume protecting Harry with Bole. Being one Chaser down, Slytherin fell further behind -- by ninety points.

Harry had Flint call another time out.

“With Bole and Derrick surrounding me, I can’t find the Snitch,” said Harry. “They need to play normally so I can go after it.”

“Potter, that mad Bludger’ll take your bleedin’ *head* off!” exclaimed Bole.

“It’s our *only* chance,” insisted Harry. “I’ll use every bit of speed of my Nimbus to keep ahead of it.”

“OK, Potter. It’s up to you,” said Flint encouragingly. “Let’s go!”

Harry used both the best-in-class speed of his broomstick and his exceptional flying skills to keep ahead of the mad Bludger. He was going all out, top speed. But Slytherin was still falling behind -- now by one hundred and thirty points.

Suddenly he saw the Snitch hovering near the ground by the left goal post at their end of the pitch. He was high up near midfield. He turned sharply and dove directly toward his target. He could hear the mad Bludger whistling through the air behind him. He was barely maintaining his lead.

Just as he reached the Snitch is started to dart sideways, but Harry just managed to snag it with his outstretched fingertips as he banked sharply right around the goalpost.

WHAM!

Harry heard a tremendous impact. He swiveled his head and saw that the mad Bludger had smashed directly into the goal post and imbedded itself into it. The goal post had splintered and was already beginning to fall. But he was in no danger. As Harry turned his head forward, he saw the center goalpost directly in in his face, only inches away.

Harry woke up feeling very groggy and something wet on his face. Someone was dabbing his forehead with a damp cloth. He opened his eyes.

“Dobby!” exclaimed Harry.

“Shhh!” hushed the tiny house-elf. “Harry Potter must be being quiet. He is needing to be recovering from his injuries.”

The goalpost! TOO LATE!!!

Harry remembered. He groaned. The memory of it awakened his mind to every aching joint and muscle in his body -- seemingly from head to toe.

He glanced around. Even without his glasses, he recognized the hospital wing. It was nighttime, but not after hours, because the main doors were still open, and the torches were bright.

“What are you doing here, Dobby?” asked Harry, still trying to gather his thoughts.

“Dobby is looking after Harry Potter. Dobby is warning Harry Potter before school. But Harry Potter is not listening to Dobby. Now terrible things is happening at Hogwarts. Dobby is trying other ways to be saving Harry Potter.”

“Dooobyyyyy!” exclaimed Harry through gritted teeth. “*You* jinxed that Bludger to come after me. You tried to *kill* me.”

“Not *kill* you, sir. Never kill you,” said Dobby earnestly. “Dobby is trying only to have Harry Potter being sent away from Hogwarts.” Then the elf tried to mop Harry’s forehead again with the damp cloth.

Harry swatted it away angrily. “I should *wring your neck*. I can barely *move!*”

“Dobby is being accustomed to death threats. He is getting them all the time at home,” Dobby squeaked miserably.

“Home! Right!” exclaimed Harry. “I know you’re the *Malfoy’s* house-elf. If you don’t tell me the truth *right now*, I’ll have my friend, Draco Malfoy, tell his *father* what you’ve done. What’ll it *be*, Dobby?”

The little elf trembled in fear but did not say anything.

Harry upped the ante. “It’s *not* going to be clothes -- what Draco’s father gives you -- will it, Dobby?”

Dobby was positively quaking. He sat down and grabbed his knees to his chest and started rocking back and forth, moaning.

Harry suddenly felt he had gone too far. Soothingly he said. “Dobby. I *know* you can tell the truth when you *want* to. Just like you can leave your house. Now *please* tell me the truth.”

Dobby cried the whole time, but he told Harry everything he knew. And he promised not to bother Harry again, though he begged Harry to leave Hogwarts several times. Then he disappeared with a small pop.

Soon after, Madam Pomphrey came to check on him. She told him he had broken almost every bone in his body, but that she had mended them all very easily. The muscle and joint pain was another matter. She made him drink what seemed like a gallon of foul-tasting potion before she would leave him alone. “A good night’s sleep tonight *and* tomorrow and you’ll be fit for class on Monday morning.”

“Wait,” said Harry as she was about to return to her office, “What was the *score?*”

“*Quidditch!*” exclaimed Madam Pomphrey. “That sport should not be allowed for *schoolchildren.*” Then seeing Harry’s anxious look, she sighed, “Very *well...* it was

Gryffindor 210, Slytherin... 220.” She smiled, patted Harry gently on the shoulder, and returned to her office.

They had won! It made all the difference. Harry could sleep easier.

Sometime later -- it had to be near midnight -- Harry was awakened by a commotion. He was still very sore and could barely move, but he was able to turn his head enough to see Professor Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall, along with Madam Pomfrey, at the far end of the ward.

Dumbledore and McGonagall were standing next to what looked like a statue placed on one of the beds. Harry could only hear snatches of the conversation, “...attack ...Creevey ...petrified ...pictures ...melted ... Chamber ...indeed open ... but how, not who.”

It seemed that Professor Dumbledore knew *who* opened the Chamber of Secrets but not *how* they did it.

Harry desperately wanted to talk to Hermione and Draco and tell them everything he had learned. But there was nothing to do but wait quietly and let everyone assume he was asleep. Unfortunately, he had to pee...urgently.

It was some time before Dumbledore and McGonagall left. Then Madam Pomphrey was busy getting and placing a screen around Creevey’s bed. Finally, she returned to her office.

It was agony waiting, but Harry managed to get the pee jug off his bedside table just in time.

Harry could not remember when he finally managed to fall asleep with his mind racing as it had been, but he felt rested and much better the next morning. At least he was able to sit up.

Madam Pomphrey served him a delicious breakfast -- as good as he would have gotten in the Great Hall.

Harry's patience nearly exhausted, Hermione and Draco finally arrived.

"Brilliant *catch*; brilliant *win*, Harry," said Draco approvingly. Then he quipped, "Though your last turn was a *little* too tight... WHAM!" He clapped his hands together as it said it.

Hermione winced. "We thought you'd been *killed*. It looked *awful*."

"Seriously... thought you were a *gonner*, mate," said Draco earnestly.

Harry noted that Draco's grammar always seemed to break down when he was being most genuine.

Hermione continued, "Madam Hooch had Professor Snape check out the '*Rogue Bludger*' -- that's what they're calling it -- but he didn't find any evidence of enchantment or Dark Magic or..."

"It was Dobby," said Harry evenly.

"DOBBY!" exclaimed both Draco and Hermione.

Harry told them everything.

Dobby told Harry that his Master, Lucius Malfoy, had succeeded in introducing Dark Magic into Hogwarts to cause the Chamber of Secrets to be opened. The Dark Magic was created by Voldemort (He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named as Dobby always called him) when he had been a student at Hogwarts. But Dobby did not know what the Dark Magic was.

Draco clearly did not like what he was hearing. But he did not say anything.

"But last summer, didn't Dobby tell you that Voldemort *wasn't* involved?" asked Hermione.

Harry sighed, "Dobby reminded me that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named wasn't yet He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named when he was a student at Hogwarts."

"That's Dobby," deadpanned Draco.

“Well, we’re back on track,” said Hermione. “We now know *Voldemort* is the Heir of Slytherin and we just need to figure out what this bit of Dark Magic is and how to defeat it.”

“*Simple* as that,” said Draco sarcastically.

“It is,” said Harry, “because Professor Dumbledore also knows Voldemort opened the Chamber of Secrets, but he doesn’t know how. I say, it’s in *his* hands to solve now.”

“How do you know?” asked Hermione.

Harry told them about Creevey being brought in and what he had overheard.

“Just a minute,” said Hermione jumping up. She looked over at the door to Madam Pomfrey’s office, which was closed. Then she quickly walked to Creevey’s bed and went behind the screen. She returned in less than a minute.

She reported, “It looks like Colin was taking a photograph when he was petrified; his hands were curled in front of his face like this.” She pretended to be taking a picture and then said, “The camera was on his nightstand. It was open and the film was all melted.”

“What kind of monster could do that?” asked Draco.

Hermione shrugged.

“You know, there hasn’t been an announcement yet, Harry,” said Hermione, “But Professor Dumbledore did call a meeting with the Head Boy and Girl and all the Prefects after breakfast.”

“He probably needed to notify Creevey’s parents and the Ministry first. I bet there’ll be an announcement at dinner,” said Draco. Then he looked down and said, “I’ve been holding back. I should have told you something before now...”

Harry and Hermione looked at each other.

Draco raised his head but did not look at either of them. “Remember the letter I wrote to my father a month ago? ...Well, I got his answer a week later... He said the monster in the Chamber of Secrets only kills Mudbloods... Sorry, sorry... I mean, Muggle-borns.”

Hermione sucked in her breath.

Draco closed his eyes and continued, “But he *doesn't* know what the monster is. He said I had nothing to worry about, but that I should stay away from... Muggle-borns... and let the monster *get on with it*. The last thing he said was I'd be safer still if I stuck close to Potter because...”

Draco opened his eyes and looked at Harry, “...because you appear to be on a path to eventually *surpass* the Dark Lord.”

“No!” gasped Harry.

Chapter 8 – The Dueling Club

On Sunday, Madam Pomfrey decided to release Harry from the hospital wing before lunch. She made him do all kinds of stretching exercises first. Harry pretended they did not hurt.

Harry rushed to the library and found Draco and Hermione there as expected. They left to walk the grounds before going to lunch. Draco seemed distracted.

Hermione read Draco and gently asked him if would be willing to tell them more about his father. It seemed as if Draco had wanted to open up but needed someone who wanted to listen.

Draco *did* want to talk about it. He said his father had supported the Dark Lord before his downfall. However, he had sworn before the Wizengamot that he had been under the Imperius Curse and was not convicted... but only because *money* had changed hands.

Hermione briefly explained to Harry what the Imperius Curse was. But she did not comment on Draco's assertion of bribery at the highest levels of wizarding government.

Draco said his father maintained his innocence publicly, but at home, or among others like himself, he admitted he had been a Death Eater -- a true follower of the Dark Lord and part of his inner circle. “He still is,” Draco said.

Draco stopped and looked at Hermione. “I'm sorry, Hermione. Last summer, I never told my parents you were Harry's friend... and I never told them you're *my* friend too.”

Hermione's lower lip trembled.

Draco continued. "My family is pure blood going back many, many generations; my parents look down on anyone who isn't. You saw how my father behaved in Flourish and Blotts. I used to think like they do. I didn't know any better until I met Harry and you. There is nothing superior about having all magical parents and ancestors."

Hermione teared up and hugged Draco.

Draco went stiff and said, "Stop, Hermione, please."

Hermione let go of Draco and said, "I understand. Thank you for telling us."

"Yeah, thanks, Draco," said Harry. "But tell me, what happened in Flourish and Blotts?"

Draco and Hermione told them about being there to get their schoolbooks and meeting Gilderoy Lockhart, who was doing a book signing. That's when an altercation had erupted between Mr Malfoy and Mr Weasley that ended up in a scuffle. Though the Weasleys were also a pure blood family, they supported Muggle Protection Laws and were considered blood traitors by the Malfoys and their kind. Mr Malfoy had provoked Mr Weasley.

"It was obvious to me, my father did it *intentionally*," said Draco finally.

Hermione changed the subject back to the Chamber of Secrets. "I've still been trying to think of a way that Draco's father could have introduced Dark Magic created by Voldemort into Hogwarts. Did he give you anything unusual to bring to school, Draco?"

Draco shook his head.

Harry had an inspiration, and exclaimed, "Could *Draco* be under the Imperius Curse?"

Draco's eyes went wide, while saying, "I don't feel any different."

"You wouldn't be able to say so even if you were," said Hermione. "You can only overcome the curse by having exceptional will power to resist it. But I don't think Draco has been cursed because he's on our side and telling us things his father wouldn't want us to know."

“Thanks, Hermione,” said Draco gratefully.

Harry tried again. “OK. How about this... Voldemort’s spirit left Quirrell and then contacted Draco’s dad. And they figured some way to get his spirit back into Hogwarts by possessing someone else so they could open the Chamber of Secrets.”

“But we haven’t seen anyone with a Turban... though almost everyone here wears a hat.” said Draco.

“I thought of that too,” said Hermione. “It *almost* fits -- except for a couple of points... Why would Voldemort’s spirit need to go to Mr Malfoy? It can go wherever it wants and possess anyone *without* his help. And remember, Dobby said Mr Malfoy was planning to introduce Dark Magic that was created by Voldemort when he was a *student*, not the Voldemort of today. That was why Professor Dumbledore didn’t understand the ‘*how*’ of it.”

“But wait,” said Harry. “Professor Dumbledore said Voldemort, the Heir of Slytherin, has opened the Chamber of Secrets -- or at least Dark Magic he created that can make the Chamber of Secrets *believe* Voldemort has opened it.”

“It has to be the latter, Harry,” said Hermione. “Don’t you think Professor Dumbledore would be doing something if he believed that Voldemort himself was actually back in the school possessing someone again?”

“I suppose so,” said Harry.

The next thing they discussed was how the monster was getting around the school. It seemed to be invisible, though each time Harry had heard it, it was always through a wall, floor, or ceiling. Ghosts could do that, but they could not kill or petrify people. What kind of creature the monster was remained a mystery.

That made them wonder why Creevey had been *petrified* and not killed. Hermione told them he was Muggle-born. Whereas the letter from Draco’s father said the monster only *killed* Muggle-borns -- another mystery.

Harry had another sudden thought. “Draco, can you summon Dobby? He may be able to tell you what he couldn’t or wouldn’t tell me.”

Draco explained he was *not* allowed to call Dobby unless it was a *life-and-death* emergency. And at home, only his parents dealt with Dobby. “I didn’t see him that much

actually... house-elves are not supposed to be seen. I usually only saw him when my father or mother called him to make him punish himself for something.”

Harry and Hermione looked at each other but did not say anything.

Then Hermione said it would not work anyway because you could not Apparate or Disapparate in the castle or the grounds. She had read it in *Hogwarts -- A History*.

“That *can't* be right,” said Harry. “How did Dobby visit me in the hospital wing? I didn't see him arrive, but when he left, he vanished right in front of me -- just like he did at the Dursleys.”

Hermione looked perplexed and finally said, “I'll have to do some research on that.”

“This conversation is making my head spin,” said Draco. “Let's go to lunch.”

Professor Dumbledore was at lunch on Sunday, which was unusual. The Prefects had been told to round up all the students and have them in the Great Hall. Dumbledore made an announcement about Colin Creevey.

The news was extremely unsettling to the students. If someone had set off a Filibuster Fireworks, panic would have ensued. Instead, murmurs could be heard growing throughout the Hall as Professor Dumbledore also announced new security measures and restrictions. Students began swiveling on the benches and soon almost every pair of eyes were on Harry.

But that was because there was safety in numbers. In the corridors, classrooms, and elsewhere, few students would meet his eyes -- except Hermione and Draco.

Draco and Hermione signed the list to stay for Christmas and sent letters to their parents explaining they wanted to experience Christmas time at Hogwarts. The real reason was to keep Harry company.

The next week, a notice was posted to sign up for a new Dueling Club. It was organized by year group. Almost every second-year signed up, including Harry, Draco, and Hermione. But when they arrived in the Great Hall for the first session and learned that Professor Lockhart was hosting the club, Harry and Draco groaned loudly -- to Hermione's immediate disapproval.

Professor Lockhart was, as usual, all bluster and bravado. However, they did learn two important new spells, *Protego* and *Expelliarmus*, which, of course, Hermione already knew, but had never used against someone.

Professor Lockhart had Professor Snape assist him in an initial demonstration -- which made Lockhart look like a complete idiot... again.

Then Lockhart had the students pair up to practice. Draco paired with Hermione. No one wanted to pair with Harry. Professor Snape paired him with Neville Longbottom, who looked absolutely terrified. Professor Lockhart ordered everyone to begin, "On the count of three..."

Chaos reigned.

Professor Lockhart called a hasty halt, and along with Professor Snape, changed some of the mismatched pairings. The practice resumed but the session quickly descended into chaos once again.

Once more Professor Lockhart called a halt. This time he called for another demonstration but using students instead. Professor Snape proposed pairing Draco and Ron Weasley, which Lockhart thought was an excellent suggestion.

Professor Snape whispered something to Draco as the two students faced each other. On the count of two -- not waiting for three -- Draco yelled, "*Surpensortia!*"

A huge snake shot out of Draco's wand. It landed in front of Ron and raised itself up ready to strike him. Ron froze in terror. He had not yet cast a spell of his own.

Harry reacted instantly. He jumped in front of Draco but behind the snake and commanded, "*Leave him alone!*"

The snake turned and looked at Harry. Then it turned on Ron again, but dropped down and coiled up -- though still looking quite deadly. Of course, Harry had instinctively used Parseltongue to prevent the snake from striking Ron.

It had suddenly become deathly quiet in the Great Hall. All the students had learned the previous year that Harry was a Parselmouth, but *witnessing* it was a different matter.

Ron was scared and angry because he did not understand what had happened. He pointed and yelled at Harry, “You’re the *cause* of all this, Potter! *You’re* the Heir of Slytherin!”

Harry lost his temper and yelled back, “I just saved your *butt*, Weasley.”

Ron started to raise his wand, thought better of it, and instead, stormed out of the Great Hall.

The first meeting of the Dueling Club was over. Professor Snape vanished the snake and Professor Lockhart dismissed the students.

Harry, Draco, and Hermione huddled after everyone else had left. Harry was still seething about what Ron had said. He was also angry with Professor Snape. “*Why* did he have you use that spell, Draco? It just made everyone *hate* me even more,” said Harry bitterly.

“You’re taking it too seriously, Harry” said Draco dismissively. Then he laughed, exclaiming “I thought it was *great!* Did you see the *look* on Weasley’s face? I thought he was going to *pee his pants.*”

“Well, I think Harry has *every right* to be angry,” said Hermione righteously. “And it was *cruel* what Professor Snape did to Ron. No one deserves to be treated like that by a *teacher.*”

Harry’s shunning only got worse.

Other than Draco and Hermione, only the Slytherins whose parents had been staunch supporters of Voldemort still supported Harry. They were pure bloods who believed they were immune from the monster freed from Chamber of Secrets. Harry’s attack on Ron -- which was how the Dueling Club incident had been interpreted by the students -- was seen as more proof of Harry’s guilt. Though Ron was a pure blood, his family were considered blood traitors by Voldemort’s followers, so the attack on him was not inconsistent.

Perhaps not surprisingly, there were two other students who rejected the idea of Harry being the Heir of Slytherin -- Fred and George Weasley. They told Hermione, “It makes no sense at all. Why would the Heir of Slytherin be *dating* a Muggle-born Gryffindor? It’s just *mad.*”

“We are not *dating*, and I am *not* his girlfriend,” insisted Hermione.

“Right...” Fred and George said together.

At every opportunity, the Weasley twins made lighthearted jokes in the corridor about Harry being the Heir of ‘anything-that-sounded-ridiculous’ whenever they saw him -- “the Heir of Pineapples... the Heir of Lavatories... the Heir of Dragon Pox...” etc. It lifted Harry’s spirits a bit and he thanked them.

Harry decided to talk to Ron and explain what happened at Dueling Club. He asked Hermione to have Ron meet him in the library twenty minutes before the security curfew. Most students were now voluntarily returning to their common rooms right after dinner, so the castle seemed deserted as Harry made his way up the marble staircase to the first floor. Just as he started down the corridor toward the library, he stopped short.

It could not have been worse.

Ron was face down on the floor looking like he was doing push-ups on his fingertips -- except he was *petrified* just like Creevey. It looked like he had reacted in shock to something he had seen -- obviously the monster -- and then toppled over, petrified. But there was more.

Professor Binns was floating a few feet in front of Weasley, but something was wrong with him too, though he was not petrified. He was slowly twisting in the air and smoking as if his robes had been burned. He looked charred. His face was frozen in a state of shock, and he was clearly not conscious. Harry knew that Professor Dumbledore had assigned the teachers to patrol the castle as part of the enhanced security measures. Binns must have been accompanying Ron.

Harry immediately understood that this was no place for him to be found. He started backing away when a voice he recognized only too well, screeched from behind, “YOU! *Caught* in the act. I’ll have you *now*, Potter!”

It *had* just gotten worse.

Harry spun around. Mr Filch was charging at him with his hands out going for Harry’s throat. Harry jumped back, almost tripped over Ron, drew his wand, and hit Filch with the full body bind curse -- just in time.

Filch's legs and arms snapped together, and he toppled flat onto his face. Harry heard a loud crunch that had to be Filch's nose. Harry winced.

Then the *very* worst.

Peeves arrived a second after the crunch.

Harry thought the annoying Poltergeist actually looked shocked.

However, Peeves recovered quickly and began screaming, "ATTACK! ATTACK! ANOTHER POTTER ATTACK! MURDER IN THE LIBRARY CORRIDORE! ATTAAAACK." He turned and sped off toward the marble staircase repeating his alarm. From the stairwell, it seemed to reverberate through the whole castle.

Further down the corridor, the library door banged open. Madam Pince came running with her wand out followed closely by... Hermione. Both stopped abruptly.

"Harry!" cried Hermione.

"Drop your wand, Mr Potter! NOW!" commanded Madam Pince.

Harry had no choice. He was done for.

Madam Pince had Hermione collect Harry's wand. Pince then had him sit on the floor facing the wall. Sitting there he could not help but notice a long trail of spiders scurrying along the wall and climbing over the toes of his shoes which blocked their way.

Curious -- spiders again.

Professor McGonagall arrived in less than a minute. She was outraged by what she saw. She collected Harry's wand from Hermione and ordered her to return to her dormitory and not mention what happened to anyone. She instructed Madam Pince to revive Mr Filch and have him help her get Weasley to the hospital wing. She said she would deal with Professor Binns later -- when she had time to figure out how to move a ghost.

Harry and Hermione had not been able to say anything to each other. He could only imagine what she must be thinking. The look on her face coming out of the library had been one of stunned shock. It made Harry ache inside.

Finally, McGonagall said, “Mr Potter, get up. I’m taking you to the Headmaster.”

“Professor, I didn’t...” started Harry pleadingly.

“Save it, Mr Potter. I *don’t* want to hear it,” said McGonagall with finality.

They walked in silence until they reached the hidden spiral staircase to Professor Dumbledore’s office. Before she could give the password, the Gargoyle jumped out of the way and Hagrid emerged from the entrance. He was holding a dead rooster in one hand.

Hagrid opened his mouth to speak, but McGonagall said, “Not now, Rebeus,” and brushed passed him pushing Harry in front of her.

When Professor Dumbledore ushered them into his office, McGonagall wasted no time recounting what she had seen -- and concluded. “I’m sorry to say it, but Mr Potter was definitely involved. He was between Mr Filch and the others and he had obviously used the full body-bind curse to subdue Mr Filch.”

Harry started to speak but Professor Dumbledore held up his hand and Harry bit his tongue. Professor McGonagall had described everything as if Harry had been the only attacker. It had not sounded good.

“Tell me, Minerva, why had Mr Filch not been petrified too?” asked Dumbledore inquisitively.

“Well... Potter must have sent the monster away before Mr Filch arrived,” responded McGonagall confidently.

“I see,” said Dumbledore evenly. “I’ll handle this from here, Professor. Please follow-up with Madam Pince. This sort of thing is not in her job description. You may go.”

It looked like Professor McGonagall wanted to stay, but she nodded in acceptance and handed Harry’s wand to Professor Dumbledore. Then she gave Harry one last very disapproving look and left.

As soon as the door closed, Harry again tried to speak, but again Dumbledore raised his hand. Harry gritted his teeth and remained silent.

Professor Dumbledore got up from his desk and came around to face Harry. On the way, he briefly stroked a beautiful bird on a perch at the side of his desk. It was easily twice the size of the largest owl and multicolored, mostly gold and red. To Harry it looked tropical. It made a pleasant, squawking sound in response to Dumbledore's touch.

"This is Fawkes, Harry. He is a Phoenix, the most loyal of birds. Ask Miss Granger to tell you about them when you have time."

When they were face to face, Dumbledore said directly, "I *know* you did not attack Mr Weasley and Professor Binns."

"You *do*?" asked Harry, feeling a huge weight lift off his shoulders.

"Yes," said Dumbledore smiling. "But I do want to know why you attacked Mr Filch -- though I can probably guess."

"He attacked *me*, sir. As soon as he arrived, he accused me and went for my throat." Harry tried to sound calm, though he was quite anxious.

Dumbledore nodded. "Well, I'll need to have a little chat with our caretaker on how we expect school staff to deal with seemingly unruly students."

Dumbledore offered Harry a chair and they both sat down.

Then he gave Harry an intense look and said, "Now then, tell me *everything*, Harry."

Dumbledore was astonished by what Harry told him -- about Dobby, Mr Malfoy, the plot, his letter to Draco, and who the Heir of Slytherin was -- all of it, except for the fact he had *heard* the voice of the monster. He finished by saying, "We still don't know how Mr Malfoy got school-aged Voldemort's Dark Magic into the school."

Dumbledore sat back into his chair.

"Remarkable, truly remarkable," said Dumbledore with admiration. "Though, I should not be surprised after what you and your friends, Mr Malfoy and Miss Granger, accomplished last year."

Harry then launched into some of the theories he, Hermione and Draco had discussed.

Dumbledore listened and then said he had been thinking along similar lines. However, he told Harry something he did not expect.

“Harry, Dobby is *correct*. You *are* in danger. Lucius Malfoy is wrong about that. I do not want you and your friends to keep looking for the answer... *but*, if you do happen to learn anything *important*, please come *directly* to me, not through another teacher first. Is that clear?”

“Yes, sir,” say Harry. He understood it to mean be more careful while looking and not to worry about Professor Snape.

On his way out of the office, Harry stopped and eyed the Sorting Hat.

Dumbledore noticed. “You are still wondering why the Hat put you in Slytherin when you wanted to be in Gryffindor.” It was not a question.

“How do you *know* that, sir?” asked Harry, desperate for an answer.

Dumbledore winked, “I talk to the Hat after each sorting. It is not a perfect process, but it works well enough. Do not concern yourself, Harry. It is the decisions *we* make, and not the decisions the Hat makes, that matter.”

Hermione was waiting in the Entry Hall when Harry and Draco came up for breakfast.

When she saw them come out of the dungeons, she ran over and exclaimed, “Oh, Harry. Thank goodness. I was so worried. I imagined the *worst* after what happened. Professor McGonagall was so angry... I thought you were going to be *expelled*.”

“When I saw your face coming out of the library, I wasn’t sure what *you* thought,” Harry admitted.

“I was shocked by what I saw. How could all that have happened while I sat in the library, completely oblivious. I didn’t hear anything until Peeves...” explained Hermione.

“Don’t worry about it, Hermione,” said Harry. “I’m glad you weren’t there. You might have been petrified too... or *worse*.”

Hermione blushed.

Harry then told Draco and Hermione everything that happened -- including the odd details like the spiders and Hagrid with a dead rooster -- and about his conversation with Professor Dumbledore -- but not about the Sorting Hat.

“It’s nice to know we were right, and that Professor Dumbledore wants us to come to him,” said Hermione proudly. “I agree that we should keep trying to find the answer about the Dark Magic.”

“And the monster,” added Draco.

“I’ve been working on that...” said Hermione as usual, briefly raising Harry’s and Draco’s expectations until she added, “but *nothing* so far.”

“And maybe explaining why Hagrid took a dead rooster to Dumbledore’s office,” Draco deadpanned.

Hermione grimaced and said sarcastically, “Uh, *you* can work on that one, Draco.”

Most students were shocked by the attack on Ron and Professor Binns, and even more shocked by the fact that Harry had *not* been expelled. Harry had obviously finished the attack on Ron he had started in the Dueling Club -- and thrown in old Professor Binns for good measure. No one could even think of a way to attack a ghost. The attack on Binns had the school ghosts in a panic.

Now, even the Weasley twins stopped their joking and avoided looking at Harry. On the other hand, the pure blood Slytherins would have made Harry headmaster -- if they could.

Almost all the Gryffindors were shunning Hermione too for continuing to associate with Harry. Surprisingly, Ginny Weasley seemed to be the only one who still talked to her, even though she seemed especially frightened.

The Weasleys ended up staying for Christmas because their parents wanted them to keep Ron company in the hospital wing. Mr and Mrs Weasley had already visited him. Professor Dumbledore and Madam Pomphrey convinced them that taking him home in his current petrified state was not a good idea -- for a lot of reasons.

On Christmas day, Harry awoke and opened his presents. Harry got a card from the Dursleys with a toothpick and a request to find out if he could remain at school during summer vacation. Hagrid got him treacle toffee. Hermione got him and Draco each a luxury quill feather. Harry had not gotten her anything again. This was two years running. It embarrassed him, and he could only think that not getting real presents growing up had jaded him.

Draco had a massive pile of presents. He handed off a large number of sweets to Harry as well as several pairs of socks -- telling him to get rid of the horrible old ones of Uncle Vernon's his aunt had given him.

Draco and Harry met Hermione and enjoyed Christmas dinner.

They sat far away from the Weasleys, who kept glancing at the three of them.

Aside from Professor Dumbledore, a few teachers, and Hagrid, they were the only people in the Great Hall.

This year, Dumbledore did not invite Harry to dine at the High Table.

All the other students who had signed up to stay during Christmas break -- and who were *not* petrified -- had changed their plans.

Chapter 9 – The Very Secret Diary

Absolutely nothing happened during Christmas break. When the students returned to start the new term, their mood had definitely improved. Things improved still more as February approached and there had been no further attacks or incidents.

Professor Vector was asked to fill in for History of Magic. Everyone thought it a vast improvement.

Harry, Draco, and Hermione were on their way to the library after dinner when they heard Mr Filch cursing. He came striding out of the second-floor corridor and passed them on the marble staircase. They decided to investigate. They discovered a flood of water in the corridor coming out of the same 'Out of Order' girls' bathroom near where Mrs Norris had been attacked.

Hermione went inside, then signaled Harry and Draco to come in when she determined it was clear. But it was not empty. Moaning Myrtle was circling above the row of lavatory stalls and wailing. Water was pouring from one of the toilets.

All three of them saw what looked like a notebook sitting in the water in the middle of the floor. Harry picked it up and thumbed through it. It was a diary from the year 1943. But it was completely blank except for the name, T. M. Riddle, written on the first page.

Hermione looked up and said, “Myrtle, could you please tell us what happened?”

Myrtle stopped circling and said, “Oh. It’s *you* again. Did you come in to throw a *book* at me too?”

“Who threw a book at you?” Hermione asked gently.

“I don’t *know*,” sniffed Myrtle. “I was minding my own business in the U-bend thinking about death when someone flushed a *book* down on top of me.” Then she wailed, “I *almost* ended up in the *Black Lake!*” and started circling again, sobbing.

“I’m sorry,” said Hermione. “Um... Myrtle, could you please stop the water overflowing?”

Myrtle shrieked, “Is that all you *care* about! I was ATTACKED!”

“Yes, we’re sorry, Myrtle, but the water...” started Hermione.

Myrtle suddenly screamed and dived into the flooding toilet. It and all the other toilets sent geysers of water to the ceiling, but then stopped. Myrtle was gone and the flooding had ended.

“What a head-case,” said Draco, shaking his head.

“Take a look at it, Hermione,” said Harry as he handed her the diary.

“It’s a *diary!*” said Hermione excitedly as she perused it, “And from *fifty* years ago! This might help us find out what’s going on. Maybe someone is trying to get rid of *evidence.*”

“But it’s *blank*, Hermione, except for the name, T. M. Riddle, on the first page,” said Harry as Hermione continued to examine it.

“T. M. Riddle?” asked Draco. “I know that name. It was on all kinds of awards in the Trophy Room that I had to polish during detention with Filch. Riddle was Head Boy too.”

“See, Harry,” said Hermione, “first-hand information. And there are many ways to make writing invisible. And did you see that the diary came from a store on Vauxhall Road? Riddle obviously operated in the Muggle world too. He might have been Muggle-born.”

Hermione put the diary in her school bag and said she would research spells in the library to reveal hidden writing. Then she would test them privately in her dorm room later to find out what Riddle had written.

As they left the girl’s bathroom, Draco said, “If I wanted to get rid of a diary, I wouldn’t try to flush it -- it’d be sure to get stuck. Burn it; that’s the sure way.”

The next day, Hermione was practically bouncing in her seat when Harry and Draco met her in the library. She had them follow her to the nearest empty classroom where they gathered around a table.

“You are not going to *believe* this!” she exclaimed.

She proceeded to show them that the diary seemed indestructible.

“Try to tear a page out of it,” she suggested excitedly.

Neither Harry nor Draco could.

Hermione was breathless. “The first thing I realized was the water had not caused the pages or binding to warp as they dried out. It was like new.”

She set the diary on the stone floor and pointed her wand at it. “*Incendio!*”

The diary was enveloped in flames. When they died out, Hermione picked up the diary and laid it on the table in front of them. It was neither burned nor singed. It was not even warm.

“I bet *that’s* why someone tried to flush it,” Draco concluded.

Hermione nodded and continued, “It has to be *full* of magic... Now watch this.”

She took out ink and quill from her school bag, opened the diary, and wrote, ‘*Hello, Tom. It’s Hermione.*’

The words disappeared. And then new writing appeared. ‘*Hello, Hermione. Do you want to talk some more?*’

Hermione wrote, ‘*I want you to show Harry Potter, what you showed me.*’

‘*Very well,*’ the diary wrote in reply.

The pages flipped themselves to fifteen June. A small window appeared on the page like a tiny television screen. Hermione told Harry to put his nose right up to the page. When he did, he seemed to go into a trance. Hermione told Draco not to worry. In just a few seconds, Harry pulled back and exclaimed, “Wow!”

“What happened?” asked Draco.

Harry described the experience -- “just like being there” -- of being led through the castle by Tom Riddle... or rather, following him. It was like Harry had been invisible and could only observe.

Draco said anxiously, “Get to the point, Harry. Tell me what *happened!*”

“*Hagrid* opened the Chamber of Secrets,” said Harry, wide eyed. “The monster is a giant *spider.*”

Hermione snorted. “You don’t for a minute believe that; do you, Harry? Hagrid, the Heir of Slytherin. It’s *ridiculous.*”

Harry shook his head as if he were trying to clear it. Then he said, “No. No... You’re right, Hermione. We know he *couldn’t possibly* be the Heir of Slytherin. Why did I say that?”

“Tom is *very* persuasive, I’ll admit,” said Hermione, “But could it be that Hagrid was being *possessed* by Voldemort, like Quirrell was, and got the blame for it? Tom wouldn’t have known that.”

“Yes, that makes sense,” said Harry smiling. “Draco, do you want to see what Tom wrote?”

“No thanks, Harry,” declined Draco. “I don’t want anyone getting into *my* head. *That* sounds like being possessed to me. And why is it suddenly ‘*Tom*’?”

Harry and Hermione ignored the question.

“OK then...” declared Harry, “it’s time we went to see Hagrid again.”

“Wait,” said Draco. “What we need to do is take this diary to Professor Snape or Dumbledore *right now*. Look at it. It must be *full* of dark magic to be able to do all these things.”

He then pointed at the diary and said, “*This* could be the very thing my father used to introduce the Dark Lord’s old dark magic into the school. It’s *fifty* years old. It *fits*.”

“Surely not,” said Hermione, picking up the diary and holding it over her heart. “It’s a Muggle-born diary, Draco.”

Draco’s eyes narrowed. “You don’t *know* that, Hermione.”

Hermione puffed up and said, “Well, it’s very *likely*...”

Harry interrupted, “All right, we’ll take it to Professor Dumbledore *after* we see Hagrid and show him the diary.”

Draco looked unconvinced.

“We’ll go see him on Saturday,” said Harry. “It’s only a couple of days. We can’t go out at night because of the increased security and, if we use my Invisibility Cloak and get caught, we’d risk the House Championship again.”

Draco agreed and Hermione put the diary back into her school bag.

The next morning, Hermione was waiting outside the Great Hall. She was extremely distraught.

“The diary’s *gone!* Someone *stole* it from my school bag. It had to have been last night.”

“Did you tell anyone what it was?” asked Draco.

“No,” said Hermione tearfully. “But anyone in Gryffindor could have seen it when I was looking at it in the common room.”

“It must have been a girl...” said Draco, “if they got it out of your dorm room.”

Hermione sighed, “Maybe, but I can’t be certain. I put it in my school bag when I started my homework. But I got up once to go to the bathroom. It could have been taken then.”

They did agree that a *Gryffindor* had to have stolen it. Draco accused Ron, but then immediately remembered that he was still in the hospital wing -- petrified. “Sorry... I guess we’ll have to excuse him... *this time.*”

They still went to see Hagrid on Saturday.

Hagrid did not want to talk about it, but when they made it clear they knew he wasn’t the Heir of Slytherin, he opened up.

He admitted that Tom Riddle had caught him with “Aragog” -- the name he had given the giant spider. But he swore he had raised it from an egg, and it had never left the cupboard where he kept it. It had only escaped when Riddle caught him feeding it. So, *Aragog could not* be the monster from the Chamber of Secrets.

He also swore he was never possessed, declaring, “People that’s been possessed have gaps in their memories. That *didn’t* happen ta me,” he said emphatically. “I remember that time like yesterday. Never ferget it... Got expelled. Wand snapped. Only Perfessor Dumbledore believed me. He talked the Headmaster, Perfessor Dippet, inta givin’ me this job an all.”

“We believe you, Hagrid,” said Hermione.

“Can you tell us anything about Tom Riddle?” asked Draco.

Hagrid looked away and shook his head. “Head Boy. Smart. *Real* popular too -- fer a Slytherin. Had a bunch of followers -- gang members really. Yer gonna have ta talk ta Perfessor Dumbledore ’bout ’im.”

When they returned to the castle, Harry used Hedwig to send Professor Dumbledore a note that he, Draco, and Hermione wanted to see him about something they had learned.

Dumbledore sent the note back telling them to come to his office after dinner --
'PS: licorice wands.'

For the first time ever, Professor Dumbledore was demonstrably angry.

"You should have brought that diary to me *immediately!*" he declared very sternly.

Draco looked at Harry and Hermione with an I-told-you-so look on his face.

Dumbledore strode to the nearest window in his office. It opened even before he drew his wand. Pointing it out the window, he said, "*Accio* Tom Riddle's diary." But nothing happened. He sighed, "I did not expect that to work, but I had to try."

Dumbledore turned back to them and said, "Tell me *everything* you learned about that diary in as much detail as you can remember."

Dumbledore sat behind his desk. He kept his eyes closed and his fingertips pressed against his forehead as he listened. The only question he asked was, "You definitely tried to *destroy* it?"

When they had finished, he said, "That diary is the key to these attacks and *must* be found."

"Sir," asked Draco, "are you going to tell the Ministry about my father?"

"No, Mr Malfoy. I have no proof of his involvement even if I had the diary. Dobby did not know about the diary and, even so, the Ministry would never take the word of a house-elf over that of the head of a respected and powerful wizard family."

Hermione huffed to show her indignance.

Professor Dumbledore ordered a search on Sunday of Gryffindor tower by the teachers and had Professor McGonagall interview every Gryffindor student. The search turned

up nothing -- except the usual student contraband, including an enormous quantity of illegal fireworks in Fred and George Weasley's school trunks. And no student admitted to knowing anything about an old diary, except Ginny Weasley who said she had seen Hermione in the common room with what could have been a diary.

The search generated a lot of buzz and rumors among the students across the school, especially since the other houses had *not* been searched.

At dinner that night, Professor Lockhart announced that the school needed a distraction from all the concern about a monster -- which he declared had been scared off by all the additional security measures, not to mention his own reputation as a 'monster hunter'.

The distraction turned out to be a Valentine's Day celebration on the fourteenth of February. The Great Hall was already decorated for the occasion, quite gaudily, when the students arrived for breakfast. Professor Lockhart, wearing lurid pink robes, gleefully announced ongoing Valentine activities for the school day, including delivery of valentines by a dozen dwarves dressed in ridiculous cupid costumes.

To his dismay, Harry got one of the deliveries between classes. His was a singing valentine. Draco had to put Harry in an arm lock to keep him from getting away. The dwarf sang in a gravelly baritone:

*"His eyes are as green as a fresh pickled toad,
His hair is as dark as a blackboard.
I wish he was mine, he's really divine,
The hero who conquered the Dark Lord."*

When it was over, Draco let go of Harry and Harry laughed it off, playing along, though actually quite mortified. Many of the students who had witnessed it whistled and applauded despite Harry still being considered the Heir of Slytherin by almost all the students. Still, Harry thought that it was a huge improvement over being shunned.

"Hermione?" Draco speculated.

"Not a chance," scoffed Harry.

Chapter 10 – Double Attack

Another month went by without an attack. By now, Professor Lockhart was taking all the credit.

Madam Sprout reported that the Mandrakes were maturing rapidly and would be ready very soon for making the restorative potion for those who had been petrified.

As the Easter holidays were approaching, second year students were deciding on what additional elective subjects they would take in their third year. They had to select at least two from among: Ancient Runes, Arithmancy, Care of Magical Creatures, Divination, and Muggle Studies.

Hermione announced she had signed up for all of them. While not surprised, Harry questioned why she would take Muggle Studies having, like himself, grown up as one.

“Well, I think it will be interesting to see how Muggles are seen from a magical perspective,” said Hermione logically.

“My parents would never let me get near that subject,” said Draco, adding, “And they told me Professor Trelawney, who teaches Divination, is a fraud and a nutter.”

Draco decided on Care of Magical Creatures and Ancient Runes. In Care of Magical Creatures, he hoped to learn more about dragons. And as for Ancient Runes, he said studying “dead written languages” was more important than fortune telling because there was “ancient wisdom” and not “mumbo jumbo” to be found in them.

Harry decided on the same two electives as Draco so they could study all the same subjects together. He suspected Ancient Runes was going to be very hard work and Hermione would be able to help them a lot.

Hermione said it would be nice having more classes together next year, since most electives had students from all houses.

In mid-March, Gryffindor had its second Quidditch match, vs Hufflepuff. Harry and Draco reluctantly agreed to sit with Hermione in the Gryffindor section, though they wanted the Puffs to win. As they also expected to be criticized for not sitting with the Slytherins, they were planning to sit in the top row far to one side to be less conspicuous.

As Harry, Draco and Hermione were coming down the marble staircase from the library on Saturday on their way to the match, Harry was stunned to hear the sinister voice again.

“Kill this time... let me rip... tear...”

Harry shouted, reaching past Hermione, and pounded his fist against the wall, “IT’S THE VOICE AGAIN! It said it’s going to *kill* this time! Didn’t you *hear* it? It was *clear as a bell!*”

Draco shook his head. But Hermione said, “All I heard were the pipes hissing...” She suddenly clapped her hands to her head and shouted, “THAT’S IT!”

“What is?” asked Harry excitedly.

But Hermione just said, “I’ve got to go back and check something in the library...” She was already turning to start back up the stairs when Draco reached behind Harry, grabbed her arm, and stopped her.

“Not *this* time, Hermione. Tell us what you’re thinking *first*,” insisted Draco.

Hermione was agitated by being delayed. “Oh, very well... I was closest to the wall. I heard *hissing* pipes; Harry heard *the voice*. Don’t you see? ...*Parseltongue!* It was *Parseltongue!* The monster must be a *snake!*”

“But what kind of snake *petrifies* people?” asked Harry.

“And how can it move through *walls?*” asked Draco.

“I don’t know,” said Hermione. “That’s what I’ve got to go find out.”

Draco released her arm, and she ran back up the stairs.

Harry and Draco both stood and looked at each other. They agreed Hermione’s idea made sense. Then they continued on their way and were halfway to the Quidditch pitch when Harry stopped dead in his tracks.

He groaned and swung to face Draco. “I’ve lost my *mind*, Draco. *Every time* I’ve heard that voice, there’s been an *attack.*”

Draco's eyes went wide.

They both turned and raced back to the school. Just as they were about to enter the castle door, Professor McGonagall came rushing out. She stopped when she saw them.

"There's been *another* attack. I want you two to wait for me here until I get back. I must inform the students to return to their house common rooms and await further instructions."

Harry tried to argue, but Professor McGonagall insisted and headed off to the Quidditch pitch at a quick trot.

"Why does she want *us* to wait?" asked Draco.

"Maybe, she suspects *me* again," responded Harry, "But I can't see *how*."

Professor McGonagall returned, herding the great throng of students returning from the Quidditch pitch. When she finished ushering them through the castle door, chiding, "Straight to your houses now, no dawdling," she turned to Harry and Draco.

"Please, follow me," and she headed into the Entry Hall at a brisk pace with the two in tow.

It was soon obvious they were headed for the hospital wing. Harry feared the worst but was still shocked by what he saw.

"Hermione!" he gasped. Hermione and another girl, a Ravenclaw that Harry did not know, were laid out on adjacent beds.

They were both petrified.

Draco sighed with relief, "I was afraid she'd been *killed*."

Both Hermione and the other girl looked to be leaning forward -- each with one arm stretched out holding a makeup mirror at an angle.

"Miss Granger and Miss Clearwater were found together like this near the library," said McGonagall. "Can either of you explain it?"

Harry still did not want to mention the voice, so he said, “Professor, Hermione told us right before we headed to the Quidditch pitch she thought the monster was a *snake*. Then she went to the library to look up something.”

“That’s right, Professor,” echoed Draco.

“A *snake* you say?” McGonagall scoffed, “What kind of snake *petrifies* people? And why would those two be holding *mirrors* like that?”

Harry and Draco did not know.

“Now, I don’t want you two spreading idle *rumors*. Is that *clear*?” said McGonagall sternly. “Go straight to your house and await further instructions.”

Professor Snape was waiting in the Slytherin common room with the rest of their housemates when Harry and Draco entered.

“Now that we’re *all* here...” said Snape while glaring at the two of them.

He proceeded to inform the Slytherins of the double attack against Hermione Granger, whom everyone knew, and Penelope Clearwater, a sixth-year Ravenclaw Prefect. He also announced new security measures which included mandatory teacher escorts to and from common rooms, classrooms, the library, and the Great Hall. It meant the students could only move in large groups with teachers whenever they went anywhere. Otherwise, they were confined to their houses.

Snape finished by saying that the Headmaster was scheduled to meet with the Minister for Magic, Cornelius Fudge, after dinner to discuss additional security measures.

When Professor Snape left, everyone wanted to know if Harry and Draco knew anything. The popular belief that Harry was the Heir of Slytherin had just blown up. Everyone realized he would never have ordered the monster to attack his own girlfriend.

Before they went to bed, Harry begged Draco, “Can’t you please tell everyone Hermione isn’t my *girlfriend*?”

Draco just laughed.

Chapter 11 – The Chamber of Secrets

The next morning at breakfast, Professor McGonagall addressed the students before they were served.

She informed them that Professor Dumbledore had been temporarily suspended by the school governors and that she would be acting headmistress until he returned.

This was disquieting news to all the students -- except for most of the Slytherins -- and caused quite a commotion. Professor McGonagall had to bring the students to order before she could go on.

She read aloud a note left by Professor Dumbledore.

“I will have only truly left this school when none here are loyal to me.”

It was nice sentiment, but only seemed to emphasize the fact that the school was less safe without its famous and powerful wizard headmaster.

McGonagall also announced that the Minister for Magic had removed Hagrid to Azkaban under protective custody until the situation had resolved. This immediately led to rumors that Hagrid was the Heir of Slytherin -- or perhaps more likely, his *assistant*. No one seriously believed either rumor -- except Professor Lockhart, who accepted the first rumor as undeniable fact.

When mail was delivered, Harry received a note from Professor Dumbledore. He opened it excitedly. It said:

Help will always be given at Hogwarts to those who ask for it.
A.D.

‘What?’ Thought Harry. He showed it to Draco. They were not able to determine a hidden meaning.

“Why can’t he be more *direct*?” complained Harry. “We’re kids, not philosophers.”

Most of the Slytherin students from the older pure blood families were very happy Professor Dumbledore was gone. Draco told Harry his father had always hated Dumbledore because he had been the leading opponent of the Dark Lord. He said most of the pure blood families felt the same way.

“Well, I think Professor Dumbledore is great,” said Harry defiantly.

“I know that,” said Draco calmly. “I’m just letting you know how things stand. For my part, I’ve never seen Dumbledore unfair to Slytherins -- though sometimes he is seriously *weird*. Even my father says he’s undeniably one of the greatest wizards of all time.”

“Yea,” said Harry sharply, “the *only one* Voldemort was ever afraid of.”

Draco shrugged.

Harry started getting apologies from students in the other houses, but mostly from Gryffindors. Fred and George were the first. “Sorry, Harry. We knew from the off you weren’t the Heir, but when Ron got it... we sort of lost our heads. Hope you’ll forgive us. Old Perce is in a state -- Clearwater is his *girlfriend* if you didn’t know. And Ginny’s near *mental* -- Hermione’s sort of been her crutch this year. Dad say’s all mum does is cry about Ron.”

In Defense Against the Dark Arts, Professor Lockhart said the danger was over because of Hagrid’s “arrest” and that the Ministry would not have done it unless it had solid proof.

Harry protested and vigorously defended Hagrid. But Lockhart just smiled and wagged his finger, saying he would be proven right when the victims were restored by the Mandrake potion.

Each week following the latest attack dragged by because of the stringent security restrictions, which had largely confined students to their houses. The remaining Quidditch matches had been held, but without student spectators allowed to attend. Slytherin beat both Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff and won the Quidditch Cup. Gryffindor came in second place.

June finally arrived.

School exams were scheduled to start the second week. Revision was the order of the day, but Harry could not keep his mind on it. He had a nagging feeling that another attack was coming.

Harry decided he could no longer tolerate sitting around and had to do something. After only one day of revising, he suggested to Draco they go to the library and try to find out what Hermione had learned. Whatever it was, it had something to do with the snakes *and* mirrors. Draco agreed.

They got the Bloody Barron to escort them and some other Slytherins that wanted to do some revising in the library. The latest security regime was the first time many Slytherins had any official interaction with the Barron -- and they did not like it. He never spoke; all he did was glower at them and rattle his chains to speed them along.

In the library, Draco started looking at books on magic related to snakes. Harry decided to look for contemporary accounts of the first time the Chamber had been opened -- fifty years previous. He asked Madam Pince for help. She suggested he look at the old Daily Prophets from 1943. She helped him find them and he returned to the table with a large stack of old yellowed newspapers.

It did not take him long to find articles. The mysterious death of a student at Hogwarts was fairly big news. It was the headline below the fold on the front page on the seventeenth of June.

The article, titled '*Mysterious Death at Hogwarts*', reported that a Hogwarts student named Myrtle Elizabeth Warren had died of unknown causes. She was Muggle-born and had been a third-year student in Ravenclaw. Her body had been found in a bathroom. The investigation was unable to determine the cause of death. However, the paper stated there were rumors of suspicious activity at the school involving Dark Magic at the time the death occurred, two days before. However, both the Ministry and Hogwarts officials dismissed the rumors as nonsense.

Harry was about to show Draco the article when Draco shoved an open book at Harry and taped it with his finger. "Look, Harry. There's a *page* torn out. The index says the missing page is about '*The King of Serpents*'. Doesn't it seem suspicious that this page would be gone? I need to see if Madam Pince has another copy of it."

While Draco was gone, Harry reread the article from the old Daily Prophet. He had a feeling he had missed something but could not put his finger on it.

A minute later, Draco rushed back to the table with a different book, saying excitedly, "Madam Pince was really mad about the torn-out page, but realized I wouldn't have brought her the book if *I'd* done it. She found me another book, '*The Monster Book of Monsters*'. It actually tried to bite her, but she just rubbed the spine and it stopped."

Draco flopped the book onto the table and flipped it open where his thumb had been marking the page. “Listen to this...”

Draco read aloud a description of ‘*The Basilisk -- King of Serpents*’.

“Truly the King of Serpents, the Basilisk is a fearsome and deadly monster. Growing to more than thirty feet long and living to an incredible old age, it kills its victims with its deadly venomous fangs or fixed eye contact with its deadly stare, which results in instant death. It does not breed; rather it is born from a chicken’s egg hatched by a toad. Spiders flee from it, but the Basilisk only flees from the common rooster, whose crow will kill it.”

Draco slapped the table with his palm. “This *has* to be the same monster that Hermione found in the other book. Except... it says that direct eye contact with a Basilisk is *fatal*. How come everyone here has been *petrified* instead of being killed?”

Harry had the answer immediately. “It must be that if you don’t have *direct* eye contact -- only *indirect* -- you get *petrified*. Hermione and the other girl were using *mirrors*. They were holding them at an angle, remember? I bet they were looking around a corner and saw the Basilisk in the mirror. And Ron saw the Basilisk *through* Professor Binns, a ghost. Binns got a full blast, but obviously, you can’t kill a ghost. And Creevey...”

Draco chimed in, “Creevey was looking *through* his camera!”

“Right,” said Harry, “And that leaves Mrs Norris...”

But the cat had them stumped. Still, they agreed it had to be something similar.

Then Draco remembered, “Hey, didn’t you tell us that Hagrid took a *dead rooster* to Dumbledore?”

“Right again,” said Harry. “Roosters can *kill* it, and a rooster turns up dead...”

“Yea, too much of a coincidence I’m thinking,” said Draco.

“So, how is a *huge* snake like that getting around without being seen? The book doesn’t say anything about invisibility,” said Harry.

Draco shook his head uncertainly and then asked, “Did you find out anything from the Daily Prophets?”

“Yea,” said Harry. He read the first article to Draco, who mulled over the word, “bathroom...” out loud.

Suddenly, Draco’s eyes widened, “Hey, I think *all* the attacks have been pretty close to *bathrooms*.”

Harry blinked and then gasped. “*That’s it!* The article says the girl died in a *bathroom*, Draco. What if she *never left*? Myrtle Elizabeth Warren -- *Moaning Myrtle!*”

Draco’s mouth gaped. Then he said urgently, “We’ve got to talk to her *now!*”

They got up to leave the library, but Madam Pince stopped them and said they would have to wait for a teacher or staff member to escort them back to their common room.

“But it’s an *emergency*,” they pleaded.

She would not budge. She even got her wand out to show them she was serious. Finally, Mr Filch arrived to escort all the students in the library back to their houses before curfew.

Back in their dorm room, Harry suggested they use his invisibility cloak to go talk to Myrtle, but Draco said McGonagall would expel them if they were caught.

“It’s just too risky with all the nightly patrols,” said Draco.

“This is so *frustrating*,” complained Harry. “I know *Myrtle* is the key to this.”

At breakfast the next morning, Professor McGonagall announced that the Mandrakes were being cut up and stewed and the broth would be used in a potion to revive the petrified students by midnight.

Almost everyone cheered. The usual Slytherins did not.

In Defense Against the Dark Arts, Professor Lockhart assured the class the revived students would all say, “It was *Hagrid*.”

At the end of class, Professor Lockhart escorted them to back to their common room. But before they had gone very far, Harry and Draco convinced him to let the class go on their own once they were already headed down the marble staircase. Lockhart agreed since it was only three floors directly down to the Entry Hall and the entrance to the dungeons, and he had much more important things to attend to -- like answering his fan mail.

It was only one floor down to Moaning Myrtle's bathroom. Harry and Draco lagged behind their classmates and ducked down the second-floor corridor without being seen. Moaning Myrtle was sitting on top of the toilet tank in the end stall when they walked in.

"BOYS AREN'T ALLOWED!" she shouted and then turned up her nose at them.

"But you *know* us," said Harry. "We've been here before. We're friends of Hermione Granger."

Myrtle looked at them again and adjusted her glasses. "Oh, I *suppose*," she sniffed gloomily. "What do you want?"

Harry was not quite sure how to ask the question because he was afraid of offending Myrtle and driving her off. "Uh, Myrtle, I hope you don't mind, but I'd like to ask you... how you... *died*?"

Harry braced for an onslaught, but instead, Myrtle actually perked up and smiled. Then she giggled, "Hee, hee... Oh, yes! It was *awful*... It happened in this very stall."

She went on to tell them how she had been teased by a fellow student about her glasses and had come into the bathroom to cry. Then a boy had come in and said something in a strange language. She opened the stall door to order him to go use the boy's toilet... and had unexpectedly died. But then she decided to come back as a ghost to haunt the schoolmate who had teased her and make her sorry for it.

"But *how* did you die, Myrtle?" asked Harry trying to maintain his patience.

"I don't know," said Myrtle, shaking her head. "All I remember is seeing two great big yellow eyes and then I sort of seized up."

"Where did you see the eyes?" asked Draco.

“Right *there*,” said Myrtle pointing toward the sink in front of her stall.

Harry and Draco ran over to it. It seemed completely ordinary. Draco turned the taps. Only the hot tap worked.

Myrtle said, “That cold water tap never worked.”

Harry took a close look at it and exclaimed, “Look, Draco! Someone’s scratched a picture of *snake* on the side of it!”

“Harry, say something in Parseltongue! Um... tell it to *open up*,” urged Draco excitedly. Harry looked intently at the small, scratched image of the snake, closed his eyes and commanded, “*Open Up*.”

“YES!” shouted Draco.

Harry opened his eyes, and the tap was spinning and shining like a bright white light. Then the whole sink dropped down and out of sight leaving a large opening at least two feet across.

“It’s a pipe, Harry... *Pipes!* That’s how the Basilisk is getting through the castle!” exclaimed Draco. “I bet there are openings like this in every bathroom in this tower... maybe every bathroom in the *castle*.”

“We need to check this out,” said Harry ducking down toward the opening.

Draco grabbed Harry’s shoulder. “Not so fast, Harry. It’s too *dangerous*. We need to see McGonagall right away.”

Reluctantly, Harry agreed.

They were trying to decide whether McGonagall would be in Professor Dumbledore’s office or her own when an announcement echoed through the castle.

It was Professor McGonagall. She ordered teachers and staff to escort all remaining students to their house dormitories immediately and then report to the Staff room.

Draco headed to the door, but Harry cried, “Wait!” and he pulled the invisibility cloak from his large robe pocket. “I’ve been carrying it around lately -- just in case.”

Harry and Draco got under the cloak and left the bathroom, but not before Myrtle cooed slyly, “Ooooh, who knows about *that?*”

They made their way as quickly as possible to the Staff room on the ground floor, passing several teachers with small groups of students. Harry opened the door just a crack and peeked inside. No one was there yet. The teachers were all still escorting students.

One of the gargoyles on either side of the door seemed to come out of a stupor and said, “Hey, what’s that? Who opened the door?”

Harry and Draco quickly went inside and closed the door.

“Musta been the wind,” said the other gargoyle groggily.

“There ain’t no wind, ya loon,” said the first.

“Ah, go back ta sleep; ya woke me up,” complained the other.

Once inside, Harry pulled the cloak off and stuffed it back into his robes. Harry pointed out a large wardrobe to Draco.

“Maybe we should hear what Professor McGonagall has to say to the teachers *before* we tell her what we found,” suggested Harry.

“Good idea,” agreed Draco.

They got inside leaving the door open just a crack.

Professor McGonagall and all but one of the remaining teachers and staff arrived within a few minutes. McGonagall informed them that there had been another attack. But this time the monster had taken the student into the Chamber itself. “We know,” said McGonagall, her voice quavering, “because the Heir of Slytherin left a new message on the wall right beneath the first...”

“HER SKELETON WILL LIE IN THE CHAMBER FOREVER.”

There were gasps from the teachers.

“Who was taken?” asked Professor Flitwick.

“I’m afraid it’s little Ginny Weasley,” said McGonagall sadly.

“Oh, that *poor* family,” cried Madam Pomfrey. “What can we *do*?”

“Nothing, I’m afraid,” replied McGonagall. “I’m sending the students home tomorrow on the Hogwarts Express and informing all the parents tonight by Owl Post.”

Just then Professor Lockhart arrived. “Sorry I’m late. I was busy...”

“Ah, just the man we need,” said McGonagall cutting him off. “A student, Ginny Weasley, has been taken into the Chamber of Secrets by the monster. Gilderoy, I am giving you the *‘free rein’* you have repeatedly requested from Professor Dumbledore to go after the monster. I recall you telling me you were sure you knew where the Chamber is. So, I charge you with recovering Miss Weasley immediately.”

Lockhart blanched white and began to stammer and stutter about “misunderstanding...” “not recalling...” and “needing more time...”

Professor Snape grabbed Lockhart by the elbow, marched him to the door and pushed him out.

“And that’s that!” declared Professor McGonagall, wiping her hands together. “Thank you, Severus.”

She continued, “Now, please, Heads of House, go to your Houses and inform your students of what has happened. Tell them to pack and be ready to leave first thing tomorrow morning. Silvanus, please cover Gryffindor for me for the time being.”

Just as she finished, Harry and Draco jumped out of the wardrobe and exclaimed loudly together, “WE KNOW WHERE THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS IS!”

All the teachers immediately spun around to stare at them.

Harry continued before they could say anything. “At least, we *think* we’ve found an entrance that will take us to it,” he said a little more calmly.

McGonagall looked at Harry very sharply and said, “Tell us what you *know*, Mr Potter.”

Harry spent the next several minutes telling the teachers what he, Hermione and Draco had discovered. He knew he had not told it as succinctly as Hermione would have, but he must have done a pretty good job, because none of the teachers asked him any questions.

“What shall we do, Minerva?” squeaked Professor Flitwick.

“We need Professor Dumbledore,” said McGonagall firmly. Then she issued a series of instructions.

“Aurora, please send an owl immediately to the Headmaster requesting his return to the school with all speed in a matter of life and death. I know he is staying nearby.”

“Heads of House will carry out my previous instructions.”

“Pomona and Severus, when you have finished informing your houses, will you please assist Poppy in preparing and administering the Mandrake potion. Those petrified students must be on the train home too.”

“Don’t forget *my cat!*” cried Filch.

“Yes, of course, Argus,” said McGonagall sympathetically.

“And Professor Binns,” chirped Flitwick.

Professor McGonagall looked at Madam Pomfrey inquiringly.

“We’ll figure out something,” said Pomfrey uncertainly.

“Good,” said McGonagall. “All others, resume your patrols. Please be careful. And Severus, please take these two with you,” pointing to Harry and Draco.

“Wait!” exclaimed Harry, objecting. “You need someone who speaks Parseltongue to get into the Chamber. You need *me* to help rescue Ginny Weasley.”

Draco jumped in, “And you need *me* because I’ve just studied the Basilisk and know how to *kill* it.”

McGonagall looked at them sympathetically and said, “I’m afraid the Heir’s new message informs us there is no hope of a rescue... I will inform Professor Dumbledore. If he needs you, I’m sure he will request your assistance.”

Harry and Draco were crestfallen.

Professor Snape escorted them back to the Slytherin common room. On the way he said, “I know you want to help, but this is no matter for two second-years. After I brief our House, I will see Professor McGonagall and come up with a plan of action until the Headmaster returns. However, you will *not*, I repeat, *not* mention what you think you know to anyone else.”

Professor Snape made the announcement to the Slytherins. Some of them snickered and seem pleased when he told them about Ginny Weasley. Snape was *incensed*. He called them out and berated them. He asked them how they would feel if it were their sister lying dead in the Chamber.

Then he ordered everyone to pack their things for the train going home in the morning and stormed out.

Harry and Draco were very upset that the teachers were not doing anything to try and save Ginny. Unlike the teachers, they did *not* assume she was dead.

They agreed a rescue had to be attempted, especially having recently learned that Ginny was a friend of Hermione’s.

“We’ll use the Invisibility Cloak as soon as the common room clears up a bit,” whispered Harry.

It did not take long. Almost everyone retired immediately to their dormitories to pack. A few were huddled here and there in conversation -- but not paying any attention to Harry or Draco.

They quietly slipped on the cloak and slipped out the door into the corridor without anyone noticing.

“Should we team up with Professor Lockhart?” asked Harry.

Draco snorted. “*Lockhart?* He’s a liar and a coward and doesn’t know *anything*.”

Harry laughed.

They found everything back to normal in the second-floor girl’s bathroom -- actually better than normal -- Myrtle was gone. The sink had resumed its original position.

“Why do you think the pipe closed up?” asked Draco.

“Maybe because we didn’t go in?” speculated Harry.

Regardless, the sink opened at Harry’s hissed command just as before.

Harry stuffed the invisibility cloak back into his robes. Then he entered the pipe feet first and slid steeply downward in slippery slimy ride, twisting, and turning until he shot out onto the stone floor of a very large drainage tunnel. There was a very faint greenish illumination on the walls themselves. But Harry illuminated his wand just as Draco shot out of the pipe behind him.

“Whoa!” exclaimed Draco. “We’re a *long* way down -- *way* under the dungeons. How are we going to get back up that pipe?”

“We’ll have to worry about that later,” said Harry, then pointing with his wand, “That’s the only way forward.”

Draco illuminated his wand too and they slowly began to walk. The tunnel was deathly quiet until about a minute later their feet started crunching. Their wand light showed the floor was now littered with small animal bones. They rounded a bend in the tunnel and stopped short.

Something massive and coiled blocked their path.

“The Basilisk!” Draco whispered anxiously. “Cover your eyes!”

But Harry had already sorted it out. He held his wand up high and outstretched. The light played over an enormous, shed snakeskin, bright green and translucent, well over twenty feet long and almost two feet wide.

Draco gulped audibly. “The thing that left that could swallow us whole.”

“Good reminder about the eyes, Draco,” said Harry. “Let’s go.”

They stepped over and around the giant skin and continued until they rounded another bend. A short distance ahead, the tunnel ended in a wall. Two entwined snakes were carved into the center from floor to ceiling. The eyes were fitted with large glittering emeralds.

“Let’s get under the Cloak again,” said Harry.

Once again, Harry commanded, “*Open*,” in Parseltongue. The hiss from his lips had not finished when the wall split open, separating the serpents as each half slid sideways out of sight.

There was a long, cavernous room dimly lit by torch lights visible through the opening. Serpentine columns supported the high ceiling.

Harry said, “*Nox*,” followed by Draco. Still holding their wands at the ready they advanced together through the doorway. It remained open.

As they advanced, a colossal statue of an ancient-looking wizard became visible against the wall at the far end of the chamber. The statue reached all the way to the ceiling.

Looking very small near the feet of the huge statue was a figure lying face down on the stone floor. It had to be Ginny. Her shiny red hair reflected the torch light.

They both tensed and stopped.

“You go,” whispered Draco, “I’ll keep a lookout for the Basilisk.”

Harry ducked out from under the cloak and ran a good distance down the chamber to reach her. He tucked his wand into his robe pocket and dropped to his knees. She was not petrified. He felt her wrist.

There was a pulse -- she was *alive!* But she felt cold.

Harry then noticed a small black book lying on the stone floor next to her hand. Harry recognized it immediately -- it was the missing diary.

Harry turned Ginny over. Her breathing was very shallow, and her face was white. He tried to waken her by shaking her shoulders, “Ginny, Ginny... wake up,” but her eyes remained shut. He took out his wand and tried *Enervate*, but it had no effect.

“She will not wake up,” said a voice behind him. It was not Draco.

Harry spun around on his knees.

It was Tom Riddle. He looked just as he had in Harry’s vision in the diary, but now he was more ghostlike than solid. He was standing only a few feet away.

“How can you *be* here?” asked Harry, “And why *won’t* she wake up?”

“You already know. I am the memory preserved in the diary,” said Riddle.

Harry pleaded, “Can you help me get her out of here...? Or go get help? ...There’s a *giant snake* here somewhere!”

“There is no danger yet,” said Riddle evenly.

“What do you *mean*?” asked Harry suspiciously.

“I want to talk to you first,” said Riddle smiling.

“There’s no *time*. We need to get Ginny *out* of here...” urged Harry.

“We are talking *now*. I am going to answer your other question... the one about... dear *Ginny*,” said Riddle sounding unconcerned.

Harry stared at him, now wondering what was going on.

Riddle proceeded to describe what had happened to Ginny after she began writing in the diary. How she had opened her heart and told all her secrets to an invisible friend -- including her childish infatuation with the great Harry Potter. How Tom Riddle had gained her trust and slowly manipulated her, preying on her insecurities. How he had grown more powerful as she had become weaker and finally... taken possession of her and forced her to do his bidding.

Riddle showed nothing but scorn and contempt for the innocent little girl.

“Yes, it was *Ginny* who opened the Chamber of Secrets, daubed the messages on the wall, killed the school roosters, and set the Basilisk loose on Mudbloods and Blood Traitors -- acting, of course, as my puppet. She eventually became suspicious of her memory lapses and tried to destroy the diary -- which you and your friends conveniently found. What a pleasure it was to meet Hermione, but before she could be channeled too, little Ginny stole it back from her friend. Still, it finally enabled me to meet... *you*.”

“And why did you want to meet *me*?” asked Harry, trying to suppress his growing anger.

“Ginny told me all about you -- your life’s story. We have surprising similarities, you and I, Harry Potter -- half-blood, orphaned, raised by Muggles, even our appearance... but *Parselmouths*? How *rare*! I was especially fascinated by your sorting into *my* House. Ally or Threat? I *had* to know. After all, you were only a *baby* when you defeated Lord Voldemort. So, I tricked you into thinking that oaf Hagrid...”

“You didn’t trick *anyone*,” interrupted Harry, “*No one* believed Hagrid was the Heir of Slytherin, except for one stupid teacher and the Minister for Magic. Professor Dumbledore knows that Voldemort opened the Chamber of Secrets fifty years ago. So why do you care?”

“BECAUSE I AM LORD VOLDEMORT!” screamed Riddle. “How *dare* you use my NAME!”

It made Harry jump to his feet and point his wand at Riddle.

“You? You’re just a *kid*!” said Harry derisively.

But then he suddenly realized what the diary was -- and it made his heart sink. Tom Riddle’s diary was the Dark Magic that had been brought into the school. How could he have not seen it? Draco had warned them that what the diary could do seemed like Dark Magic. He and Hermione had dismissed the idea. But Professor Dumbledore had understood and ordered a search for it.

Harry snapped back into focus as Riddle was speaking.

“...and my name is an anagram of ‘*I am Lord Voldemort*’, a name I fashioned for myself to reflect my proper destiny as the most powerful dark wizard in the world,” said Riddle proudly.

“What?” said Harry uncertainly, “How do you get ‘I am Lord Voldemort’ out of Tom Riddle.

“No. No. My middle name is Marvolo -- for the M on my diary,” explained Riddle.

“Marbolo?” asked Harry. “That still...”

“Marvolo, Mar vo lo!” interrupted Riddle, sounding extremely incensed.

“I still don’t get...” said Harry, now intentionally baiting him.

“Never *mind*. It does not *matter*, Harry Potter... a Slytherin who makes friends of Mudbloods and Blood Traitors... You are my ENEMY! ...But now I see you are no threat to me. As you have wasted time talking to me, I have grown stronger as Ginny has grown weaker. Soon she will be *dead*, and I shall be *reborn*.”

Harry saw that Riddle was now looking less like a ghost and much more solid. He would have to do something very soon.

“You don’t *scare* me,” said Harry bluffing. “You haven’t been able to kill *anybody* this time, and the ones who were petrified will be restored *tonight*. And I’ve beaten you *twice*, and what’s left of you hiding out there is weak and next to nothing. And you’ve *never* faced *Dumbledore* yet. It’s *Albus Dumbledore* who’s the most the most powerful wizard in the world -- NOT YOU!”

Harry had shouted the last words.

Riddle’s face erupted in fury. “Albus Dumbledore was run out of Hogwarts by the mere *memory* of me!”

Suddenly, incredibly beautiful birdsong echoed through the cavernous chamber. Harry had never heard anything like it before. It seemed to come from everywhere.

Suddenly flames erupted overhead and a beautiful red and gold bird burst forth. It dropped something it was carrying and then and flew down, landing on Harry’s shoulder.

“Fawkes!” Harry whispered excitedly.

The great bird gave Harry a sideways look and then fixed its eyes on Riddle.

“A phoenix... I see,” said Riddle nodding. “Dumbledore sends assistance to his champion. And what is *this*?”

Harry’s eyes followed Riddle’s gaze. It was on the ground to Harry’s left -- the Sorting Hat, which Fawkes must have brought. Harry was bewildered.

Riddle laughed derisively, “A bird and an old hat are all that Dumbledore sends you? Not good enough by half.”

“Tell me, Harry Potter,” Riddle continued, “if you want to live a little longer, how *did* you manage to defeat me -- just to satisfy my curiosity, of course.”

“Say *please*,” commanded Harry defiantly.

Riddle’s face contorted in rage.

But before Riddle could say anything, Harry pointed his wand straight at him and yelled, “*Incendio!*”

Flames erupted from Harry’s wand and hit Riddle squarely in the chest. But they merely flowed around him like water.

Riddle laughed.

Harry tried stunning and then every spell he could think of -- all to no effect.

Riddle smiled, “Not bad for a second-year, Harry Potter. But by this time, I had already learned the *Unforgivable Curses*. You are no match for *Lord Voldemort*.”

Riddle swiveled and raised his arms to the enormous statue against the wall behind Harry and hissed in Parseltongue,

“*Speak to me, Slytherin, greatest of the Hogwarts Four.*”

The mouth of the statue gaped open and out of it emerged the largest snake Harry had ever seen.

The Basilisk!

Harry shut his eyes and felt Fawkes take off. He backed away blindly until he stumbled against one of the huge serpentine pillars. Then he felt and heard a loud thud as the snake landed on the stone floor. It could not be more than twenty feet away. Harry blindly fired blasts of flame at the beast.

Riddle laughed. “That won’t work, Harry Potter.”

Then Riddle commanded in Parseltongue, “*Kill him!*”

Parseltongue!

Harry focused and then shouted in snake language, “*KILL RIDDLE! KILL RIDDLE!*”

Again, Riddle laughed, “Nice try, Harry Potter. But it only obeys the *Heir of Slytherin!*”

But something had happened. Harry chanced a glance through a sliver of one eye. The giant snake had reared up high as if about to strike Harry -- but had stopped. It was turning its head back and forth between Riddle and Harry as if confused.

Riddle was screaming Parseltongue at the snake and pointing at Harry, “*I said, kill HIM! KILL HARRY POTTER!*”

Suddenly Harry saw a flash of red and gold above him. Fawkes had dived at the giant serpent’s head and was slashing at its eyes with its sharp sickle-like talons. The snake hissed and swung its head frantically from side to side trying desperately to evade the ripping claws. In seconds, blood streamed from its ruined eye sockets and then Fawkes swooped away.

Riddle screamed again in Parseltongue, “*NO! HIS BIRD HAS BLINDED YOU! THE BOY IS STILL BENEATH YOU! SMELL HIM OUT! KILL HIM!*”

The Basilisk hissed with rage and struck directly downward at Harry.

But Harry was able to spin out of the way before he was crushed by the impact. He could now keep his eyes open and felt he had a fighting chance. He kept firing flaming spells at the Basilisk. Even though they were not damaging, the intense heat seemed to slow the giant snake down a little.

Still, Harry had to retreat, and he was slowly being driven down the chamber toward the entrance. Riddle remained where he was near the great statue and Ginny.

Then Harry remembered -- Draco! He had completely forgotten. Draco was going to watch out for the Basilisk. Where was he?

“Draco! Help! Please! Where are you?” he called desperately.

There was no answer.

Harry considered running but gauged that the snake was faster. He had no choice but to keep fighting. If he were pushed back into the tunnel, there would be no room to maneuver, and he would be in big trouble.

Suddenly he heard Draco shouting from outside the Chamber, “Hold on, Harry! Hold on!”

Footsteps pounded on the chamber floor behind him and then Draco was at his side. He was holding something in his outstretched hands...

...a big beautiful red *rooster*.

The rooster took one look at the Basilisk and let out an ear-splitting crow that echoed throughout the chamber.

The Basilisk reared up to its full height and let out a high-pitched hiss that almost sounded like a scream. It writhed in agony back and forth several times and then collapsed onto the floor with a ground-shaking THUD and lay still. Its enormous mouth gaped open revealing dozens of long venomous fangs.

“Ginny!” cried Harry. He immediately dashed back up the chamber followed by Draco, still holding the rooster.

Riddle cursed in outrage. But then he paused, and calmly said, “It matters not. I shall shortly take care of you both... *myself*.”

“I think not, Tom,” said a strong voice behind Harry and Draco. They all spun around. Dumbledore was striding down the Chamber with Fawkes on his shoulder.

“Dumbledore!” exclaimed Riddle sounding panicked. But then he gathered himself and sneered, “You are *too* late.”

Harry yelled, “Sir, Tom Riddle is *Voldemort!* He came out of that diary. He’s draining the life out of Ginny. We’ve got to *stop* him!”

Harry could see that Riddle now looked almost solid.

Instead of looking concerned, Dumbledore smiled at Harry and Draco and said, “I think we are *just* in time.”

Professor Dumbledore held out a hand. It was holding a twelve-inch-long fang, which he must have just extracted from the dead Basilisk.

Then he said calmly, “Harry, retrieve the diary, if you please.”

Harry ran over, picked it up, and then returned, holding it out to Dumbledore.

“Now, please place it onto the floor, Harry,” which Harry did.

Dumbledore held out the Basilisk fang to Harry and said, “Be careful not to slick yourself; the venom is quite deadly. Take this fang and stab the diary.”

Harry looked uncertain, “Sir?”

“Please do as I say, Harry,” said Dumbledore evenly.

Riddle suddenly looked worried. “What *is* this? What are you *doing?*”

Draco shouted sarcastically, “*Ruining* your day, I think!”

Harry dropped to his knees.

Riddle started shouting, “NO! NO! NO!”

Harry stabbed the diary with the Basilisk fang as hard as he could and drove it through into the stone below.

The diary erupted black ink which gushed in rivers onto the floor, and Riddle unleashed a long loud terrible scream and then exploded into sparks and vapor.

He was gone.

Just as the ink stopped flowing, Ginny let out a great sigh. Harry saw her chest rise and take strong deep breaths.

Draco dropped the rooster and knelt beside her. He gently raised her to a sitting position with his arm around her. “Are you alright?” he asked, sounding very concerned.

Ginny opened her eyes looking straight into Draco’s. Her eyes widened in surprise and then she teared up and began to cry, sobbing. “It’s all my fault. It’s all my fault.”

Harry extracted the Basilisk fang and dropped it. He picked up the ruined diary, stood up and handed it to Professor Dumbledore.

Dumbledore said, “Let us get Miss Weasley out of here. This has been a terrible ordeal for her... Oh, and will you please collect the Sorting Hat for me, Harry?”

Draco walked Ginny out with his arm still around her shoulder.

Harry retrieved the Hat and then had to collect the rooster and catch up with them. As soon as he had, he handed the Sorting Hat to Professor Dumbledore, who rolled it up and pocketed it.

Then Harry asked Draco, “Where did you get the rooster?”

“It was a matter of *life-and-death*. As soon as I saw the Basilisk from under the Cloak, I called Dobby. However, he didn’t come. I figured the Chamber’s enchantments prevented it, so I ran back into the tunnel. I was praying you and Fawkes would be able to hold it off long enough. Once I was there, I called Dobby and he came instantly. I ordered him to get a rooster from Malfoy Manor and return. It took him a while; it seemed like forever. When he returned with it, I ran back into the Chamber, and it killed the Basilisk just like the book said it would.”

“Brilliant,” said Harry.

“Yes, very much so, Mr Malfoy. Excellent work, excellent work indeed,” said Dumbledore.

Draco smiled at Dumbledore and said, “Thank you, Professor Dumbledore.”

Harry then asked, “Sir, why did Fawkes bring the Sorting Hat?”

Dumbledore smiled and said, “Ah... well the Hat can often deliver very good advice at times... among other things. But in this instance, you managed quite well without it.”

It did not make sense to Harry, but he decided not to pursue it now.

When they arrived at the bottom of the drainpipe they had entered from, Professor Dumbledore explained how Fawkes could carry them all -- as light as a feather -- back up the pipe to Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom.

Moaning Myrtle was back in her usual stall and astonished by the sight of them. She temporarily forgot to be dismal and zoomed off excitedly to tell the other ghosts.

Chapter 12 – Dobby’s Reward

Professor Dumbledore led them to Professor McGonagall’s office.

Mr and Mrs Weasley were there. They immediately leapt up and embraced Ginny, who resumed her tears. Mr Weasley thanked Professor Dumbledore for saving her, but Dumbledore said, “It was Harry and Mr Malfoy who saved her. I arrived after.”

Mr and Mrs Weasley embraced the boys and thanked them over and over, but Harry and Draco look at each other questioningly.

Seeing this, Dumbledore said, “Yes, it’s true, Harry. If I had *not* arrived, what were you going to do?”

Harry paused only a moment and said, “I was going to give the diary to Fawkes and have him take it to you.”

“And tell us why,” said Dumbledore.

“Because the diary was how Voldemort was possessing Ginny and draining away her life,” said Harry. “If the diary was taken far away from her, that would have stopped.”

“Exactly!” said Dumbledore. “The diary needed to be near her for it to work its Dark Magic. And when Mr Malfoy killed the Basilisk, it finally made it possible for you to get to the diary. So, you *did* save her. I just *interrupted* you.”

Mr Weasley gasped, “Ginny was *possessed* by You-Know-Who? How is this possible?” Ginny spoke up and tearfully told them about the diary. How she found it with one of the used schoolbooks her mother bought her in Diagon Alley. And how she had been writing in it all year.

Mr Weasley scolded her and reminded her about not trusting objects that can think for themselves.

Dumbledore gently intervened, “Ginny is *not* to blame. She was no match for Tom Riddle’s power and guile -- one of the most brilliant students Hogwarts ever had. He was, after all, the future Lord Voldemort, who has fooled many fully qualified wizards, I might add.”

Professor Dumbledore then asked Harry and Draco to tell everything that happened, which they eagerly did.

Professor McGonagall was visibly uncomfortable when Harry described her rejection of Harry and Draco’s urgent request to support a teacher-led rescue attempt, but Professor Dumbledore did not say anything.

“What happened to Dobby?” asked Dumbledore.

“I sent him back, sir. He said my father wanted him,” said Draco. “Otherwise, I would have had him wait to take the rooster back.” The rooster, which Harry had off loaded, was now investigating the hearth in McGonagall’s office.

Professor Dumbledore instructed Mr and Mrs Weasley to take Ginny to the hospital wing for recuperative treatment and rest. He also asked them to have Madam Pomfrey send Hermione to join him if she had recovered sufficiently from the Mandrake restorative potion.

Then he instructed Professor McGonagall to inform the students via their Heads of House about what had happened, to alert the kitchens that there would be a special late-night feast to celebrate, and, finally, to cancel the Hogwarts Express for tomorrow morning.

Professor McGonagall happily agreed and personally thanked Harry and Draco for their bravery and heroism. She was particularly impressed because they had done it for a Gryffindor. She even had a tear in her eye at the end.

Professor McGonagall had scarcely closed the door on her way out when Hermione burst through, breathless and energized. With her hair frizzed up, she almost looked wild.

Seeing Harry and Draco, she shrieked “You *solved* it! You *solved* it! I *knew* you would!”

Professor Dumbledore, chuckled and said, “I am glad to see you are well, Miss Granger.”

Hermione turned red, smoothed the front of her robes, and said, “Excuse me, Professor Dumbledore.”

“There is nothing to excuse, Miss Granger,” said Dumbledore smiling. “I am *exceedingly* proud of you all. And now that you are all here, it is my very great pleasure to inform you that you will each be receiving a special award for services to the school.”

Harry, Draco, and Hermione all gaped wide-eyed. But their surprise and joy were interrupted as the door burst open once again.

This time, Lucius Malfoy strode into the room waving a roll of parchment in his hand and began speaking at once.

“McGonagall told me you were here... Dumbledore, this is the Order of Suspension I served you two months ago. Why have you returned?” he demanded without any attempt at decorum.

Professor Dumbledore seemed completely unfazed by the rude outburst. “Well, Lucius, once word got out that a student had been taken by the monster, I received letters from all the other governors asking me to return. I must say, it seemed like a flurry of owls had descended upon me. Some of the governors claimed you had *coerced* them into suspending me in the first place.”

“Ridiculous,” stated Lucius contemptuously.

“Well,” continued Dumbledore, ignoring the response, “under the circumstances, I felt it would be imprudent to wait for a formal letter revoking the suspension.”

Lucius remained furious. He demanded to know if the attacks had stopped. When Dumbledore said they had, Lucius demanded to know if they had caught the perpetrator.

Dumbledore nodded, saying, “It was... *Lord Voldemort* ...acting through a student via a bewitched diary. *This* diary...” which he held up for Mr Malfoy to see.

For the first time, Draco’s father seemed hesitant to speak. He slowly said, “I... see...”

Then Dumbledore nodded toward Harry, Hermione, and Draco, who had been hidden by the open door, “If these three hadn’t discovered the diary and deciphered its effect, Miss Ginny Weasley might have been blamed for the whole thing.”

Mr Malfoy whirled around to look at the three students and his jaw dropped.

“Draco! What are *you* doing here?” he gasped, sounding completely shocked.

“Doing the *right* thing,” said Draco proudly.

“What do you *mean*?” snapped his father.

“Helping my friends prevent innocent people from *dying*.” Draco had almost spat the words.

“I don’t know what...” Mr Malfoy started to say, but Draco cut him off.

“I know it was *you* who planted the Dark Lord’s diary in Ginny Weasley’s schoolbook right before you had the run-in with Mr Weasley in Flourish and Blotts,” accused Draco.

Lucius Malfoy gaped at his son.

Hermione gasped.

But Draco continued, “Don’t *deny* it, father. Dobby told me you were plotting something to hurt the school.”

“How *dare* you! I *do* deny it. You have *no* proof,” said Mr Malfoy defiantly, having recovered, but his face had turned quite red.

Dumbledore interjected, “You are correct, Lucius. There *is* no proof. The diary is *destroyed*. In my haste I did not think, as young Harry did, of a solution that would have preserved it as evidence. However, it would be unfortunate if other things of Lord

Voldemort's should fall into the wrong hands again. I am sure Arthur Weasley would work diligently to prove they traced back to you."

Mr Malfoy's jaw was clenched, and he was grinding his teeth, staring intently at Dumbledore. Finally, he said, sounding affronted, "I'm *leaving*. I've had *enough* of your ridiculous and insulting accusations."

He spun on his heel and barked, "Draco, see me out," as he strode to the open door, where he stopped and looked back.

Draco had not moved.

"Draco, I said *come*," he commanded, "NOW!"

"I'm not going anywhere," said Draco coolly.

Mr Malfoy snarled, "How *dare* you defy me! You would accuse your own *father*! I'll deal with Dobby soon enough... and you *later*..." There was clear malevolence in his voice.

"No, you won't..." said Draco softly. Then he commanded, "DOBBY!"

There was a pop, and the tiny house-elf was standing in front of Draco. "Yes, Master Draco? Another emergency?" he squeaked.

Draco smiled and said, "No. Just a reward for helping *save my friends*." He took off his school hat and handed it to Dobby.

Dobby's eyes bulged so much, Harry thought they were going to pop out of his head. Dobby could barely speak, "M, Master Draco... is giving Dobby... a *hat*?" Then he screeched, "DOBBY IS *FREE!*"

Mr Malfoy was in total shock. It took him a moment to gather himself and then he exploded, screaming, "WHAT HAVE YOU *DONE?*"

He started back across the room at Draco, raising his cane with clear intention to strike. But even before Professor Dumbledore or anyone else could draw their wands, Dobby snapped his fingers and Mr Malfoy was blasted back through the door into the corridor.

Dobby stuck out his chest and defiantly declared, "You will *not* hurt Master Draco or his friends!"

Lucius Malfoy got up shakily, gave everyone a look of pure hatred and stormed off.

Draco put his hand on Dobby's shoulder and said, "Thanks, Dobby ...for *everything*. Enjoy your freedom. Please come see us from time to time." Then he shook the elf's tiny hand.

Dobby beamed.

Harry added, "Yea, thanks Dobby. You *did* save me after all. But please don't come to my house again... or intercept my mail... or jinx any bludgers."

Dobby smiled broadly and said, "Harry Potter is being most welcome. He and Master Draco is having the right to be calling Dobby *any* time they is needing him, sirs."

Then he said, "Farewell, Master Draco, Harry Potter, and you, Miss," bowing to Hermione.

Dobby proudly placed Draco's school hat on top of his head and vanished with a pop.

Hermione turned to Professor Dumbledore and said, "Sir, I thought you couldn't Apparate or Disapparate at Hogwarts. That's what it says in *Hogwarts -- A History*."

Dumbledore winked and said, "Wizards cannot, I included. But the school could not possibly operate if the house-elves could not. It is not commonly known, but Hogwarts has fully one hundred of them."

Hermione gaped.

Then he said, "Miss Granger, Mr Malfoy, I would like a word with Harry if you do not mind. Feel free to tell any students what happened in as much detail as you would like. I have long ago learned it is impossible to keep secrets in this school."

Dumbledore thanked Harry for his loyalty -- saying *only that* would have brought Fawkes to him.

"Fawkes saved me by blinding the Basilisk; I was a gonner otherwise... But I still don't understand why he brought the Sorting Hat," said Harry.

“As I explained before... in case you needed it; but you did not,” said Dumbledore just as cryptically as before. Then he changed the subject, and Harry knew he was never going to get a straight answer.

“Your father would be very proud of you, Harry...” began Dumbledore.

“Sir, I’ve been meaning to ask you more about him... Professor Snape said...” Harry began, but Dumbledore stopped him.

“Harry, I did not get to know your father well until after he left school. I am aware of the animosity between him and Professor Snape when they were students. Sad to say, people often hold grudges for a lifetime. We will talk more about this another time, but I will say now that your father was very brave and fought valiantly against Lord Voldemort; as did your mother. And though you look very much like your father, you are more like your mother. One last thing... which I have been meaning to tell you for some time... It was I who gave you your father’s Invisibility Cloak. He loaned it to me shortly before he died, and I wanted you to have it.”

Then they talked about what Tom Riddle said to Harry about their similarities. Harry said despite being in Slytherin, and the other things, he did not think he was like Riddle. But it sounded like he had doubts.

“You are *not* like Tom Riddle,” said Dumbledore emphatically.

Dumbledore then reminded Harry about the Sorting Hat’s choice versus his own. And for the first time, he also explained that Lord Voldemort had unintentionally transferred some of his powers to Harry when he attacked him as a baby. Parseltongue was one of them.

“How could that happen?” asked Harry.

Dumbledore looked away and said, “We cannot be sure.”

Professor Dumbledore then told Harry to go down to the feast without him because he first needed to write a letter to the Minister for Magic to get Hagrid released from Azkaban.

When Harry got to the Entrance Hall, Draco and Hermione were waiting for him. They walked together into the Great Hall.

They were cheered and swarmed by the students. Everyone wanted to shake their hands. Many apologized to Harry, some for the second time, for thinking he had been the Heir of Slytherin.

Harry was most surprised to see Ron Weasley being led over to them by Fred and George, followed by Percy. Ron, like Hermione, had only been un-petrified an hour earlier. Ron looked ashamed and embarrassed. His face was as red as a beet.

He mumbled half-heartedly, “Thank you for saving my sister.” Percy nudged him and he reluctantly held out his hand and shook hands with Harry, Draco, and Hermione. Fred, George, and Percy did the same and invited Hermione back to the Gryffindor table.

Before she went, she said, “I want to hear *everything*, but it can wait until breakfast.” At the Gryffindor table, Hermione was given all the credit for solving the mystery even though she said they had all played a part.

Draco and Harry joined the Slytherin table and were congratulated by most, but not all, the Slytherins. Then, along with everyone else, they enjoyed the best feast that anyone could remember.

Professor Dumbledore joined the feast a little later. Even Professor Binns made a brief appearance, none the worse for wear, and got a respectable cheer before departing for wherever he stayed in the castle when not teaching -- which no one knew.

Professor Dumbledore announced that end of year exams -- including OWLs and NEWTs -- would be delayed for two weeks to give everyone time to revise after what the school had been through. And after he awarded some significant last-minute points -- which everyone expected -- Slytherin and Gryffindor somehow ended up tied for the House Cup for the second year in a row. But no one complained.

Dumbledore’s announcement that Professor Lockhart would not be returning as Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher -- because he had “flown the coop” -- earned the biggest cheer of all. And when he mentioned that Lockhart, in his haste, had left a few things behind, including a trunk full of autographed pictures and... his hair curlers, the students laughed for a whole minute.

The feast went on all night.

The following day, when Hermione finally got a chance to talk to Harry and Draco, she was stunned to hear the details of what had happened in the Chamber of Secrets. She asked them how they had found out about the Basilisk. Draco told her about his own research in the library, which she praised him for. Then Hermione took out a crumpled piece of parchment from her pocket and straightened it out, showing them a page about the Basilisk torn from a book.

Draco laughed and said, “I *found* that book with the page torn out. I never would have believed you would do such a thing, Hermione. It even looks like you *wrote* on it... what... oh... ‘*pipes*’. That’s *right!*”

Hermione looked quite embarrassed said, “I was bringing it to show you. I’m going to repair the book today.”

Then she said, “You were both so brave...” and without warning gave them both a quick kiss on the cheek. Draco was second, but he still was not quite fast enough to dodge.

Draco and Harry both exclaimed, “Hermione!”

It was not a *real* kiss -- only continental style, where you touch your cheek to the other and make a kissing sound. But it was still frightening.

The rest of the school year went by in a flash -- revision and then exams, for this year only, during the last week of school. Finally, it was time to board the Hogwarts Express for the journey home.

Harry, Draco, and Hermione invited Fred, George, and Ginny to share their compartment. They played exploding snap, set off Filibuster Fireworks in the corridor and out the window, and practiced disarming spells. Of the latter, Harry was easily the best. They did not talk about the Chamber of Secrets because Ginny was still traumatized by what happened.

Harry took out parchment and a quill and exchanged telephone numbers with Hermione and asked her to phone him so they could plan summer get-togethers.

Draco asked, “What about me?”

Harry looked surprised and said, “I’m sorry, I remember you saying your family always has plans for the summer.”

Draco said, “I’m not *going* home.”

Everyone in the compartment was shocked.

“No. My Father sent me an owl saying I was no longer his son and not welcome at Malfoy Manor,” said Draco without sounding unhappy or bitter.

“Why didn’t you *tell* us? When did this happen?” asked Harry.

“The day after the feast. I didn’t want to worry you. My mother wrote the following day saying she would try and get my father to change his mind, but I wrote her back not to bother. I’ve had my last caning...”

This last comment made Ginny gasp.

Draco continued, “I know my father is a devoted Death Eater... But I don’t want to be associated with anything that stands for anymore.”

“But where will you *go*?” asked Hermione sounding very concerned.

“I’m going to live with my Aunt Andromeda. She’s my mother’s sister and was disowned for marrying a Muggle-born... my Uncle Ted. I wrote them and they welcomed me,” said Draco smiling.

Harry whooped and clapped Draco on the back. Fred and George congratulated him for his courage. And Hermione noticed that Ginny was giving Draco the most doe-eyed look she had ever seen.

Draco thanked them and said to Harry, “I’m sure Uncle Ted can show me how to *’phone*’ you. So, make me a copy of whatever you two wrote down. I’m looking forward to exploring London with you both -- or anything else you want to do.”

Then he looked at Fred, George and Ginny and said, “We’d like to have you join us.”

Fred and George said together, “You’re on, mate!”

Ginny blushed deep red, nodded vigorously and gushed, “I’d *love* to, Draco.”

All Harry could think about was what Professor Dumbledore had said about building a bridge between their two school Houses.

The End

End Notes:

Without citation, the nature of this alternate universe fan fiction story requires liberal use of terms, concepts, characters, paraphrased conversations, and story lines from “Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets” by J.K. Rowling.